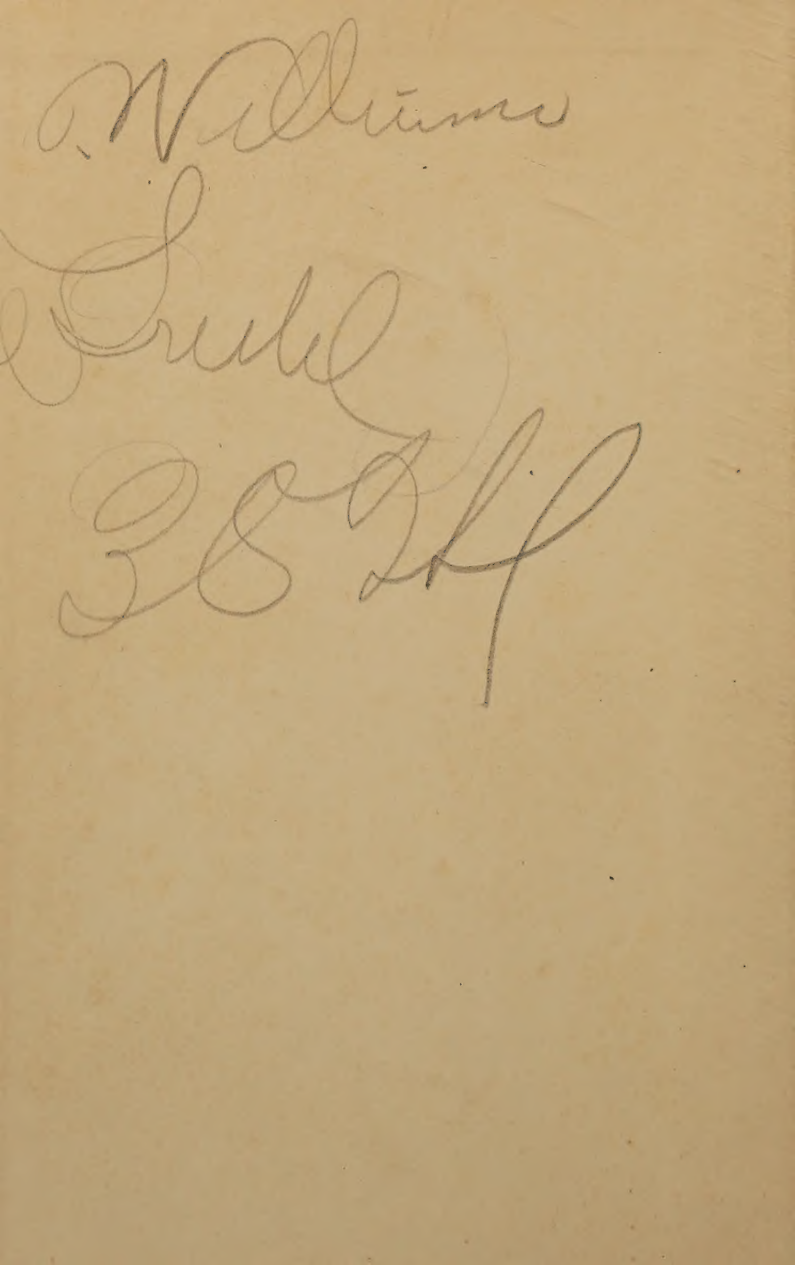
FRANK THE YOUNG NATURALIST

BY

HARRY CASTLEMON



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FRANK

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BY

HARRY CASTLEMON,

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FRANK, THE YOUNG NATURALIST.

CHAPTER I.

The Home of the Young Naturalist.

ABOUT one hundred miles north of Augusta, the Capital of Maine, the little village of Lawrence is situated. A range of high hills skirts its western side, and stretches away to the north as far as the eye can reach; while before the village, toward the east, flows the Kennebec River.

Near the base of the hills a beautiful stream, known as Glen's Creek, has its source; and, after winding through the adjacent meadows, and reaching almost around the village, finally empties into the Kennebec. Its waters are deep and clear, and flow over a rough, gravelly bed, and under high banks, and through many a little nook where the perch and sunfish love to hide. This creek, about half a mile from its mouth, branches off, forming two streams, the smaller of which flows south, par-

allel with the river for a short distance, and finally empties into it. This stream is known as Ducks' Creek, and it is very appropriately named; for, although it is but a short distance from the village, every autumn, and until late in the spring, its waters are fairly alive with wild ducks, which find secure retreats among the high bushes and reeds which line its banks. The island formed by these two creeks is called Reynard's Island, from the fact that for several years a sly old fox had held possession of it in spite of the efforts of the village boys to capture him. The island contains, perhaps, twenty-five acres, and is thickly covered with hickory-trees; and there is an annual strife between the village boys and the squirrels, to see which can gather the greater quantity of nuts.

Directly opposite the village, near the middle of the river, is another island, called Strawberry Island, from the great quantity of that fruit which it produces.

The fishing-grounds about the village are excellent. The river affords great numbers of perch, black bass, pike, and muscalonge; and the numberless little streams that intersect the country fairly swarm with trout, and the woods abound in game. This attracts sportsmen from other places; and the *Julia Burton*, the little steamer that plies up and down the river, frequently brings large

parties of amateur hunters and fishermen, who sometimes spend months enjoying the rare sport.

It was on the banks of Glen's Creek, about half a mile from the village, in a neat little cottage that stood back from the road, and which was almost concealed by the thick shrubbery and trees that surrounded it, that FRANK NELSON, the young naturalist, lived. His father had been a wealthy merchant in the city of Boston; and, after his death, Mrs. Nelson had removed into the country with her children, and bought the place of which we are speaking. Frank was a handsome, high-spirited boy, about sixteen years of age. He was kind, open-hearted, and generous; and no one in the village had more friends than he. But his most prominent characteristic was perseverance. He was a slow thinker, and some, perhaps, at first sight, would have pronounced him "dull;" but the unyielding application with which he devoted himself to his studies, or to any thing else he undertook, overcame all obstacles; and he was further advanced, and his knowledge was more thorough than that of any other boy of the same age in the village. He never gave up any thing he undertook because he found it more difficult than he had expected, or hurried over it in a "slipshod" manner, for his motto was, "Whatever is worth doing at all, is worth doing well."

At the time of which we write Frank was just

entering upon what he called a "long vacation." He had attended the high-school of which the village boasted for nearly eight years, with no intermission but the vacations, and during this time he had devoted himself with untiring energy to his studies. He loved his books, and they were his constant companions. By intense application he succeeded in working his way into the highest class in school, which was composed of young men much older than himself, and who looked upon him, not as a fellow-student, but as a rival, and used every exertion to prevent him from keeping pace with them. But Frank held his own in spite of their efforts, and not unfrequently paid them back in their own coin by committing his lessons more thoroughly than they.

Things went on so for a considerable time. Frank, whose highest ambition was to be called the best scholar in his class, kept steadily gaining ground, and one by one the rival students were overtaken and distanced. But Frank had some smart scholars matched against him, and he knew that the desired reputation was not to be obtained without a fierce struggle; and every moment, both in and out of school, was devoted to study.

He had formerly been passionately fond of rural sports, hunting and fishing, but now his fine double-barrel gun, which he had always taken especial care to keep in the best possible "shoot-

'ng order," hung in its accustomed place, all covered with dust. His fishing-rod and basket were in the same condition; and Bravo, his fine hunting-dog, which was very much averse to a life of inactivity, made use of his most eloquent whines in vain.

At last Frank's health began to fail rapidly. His mother was the first to notice it, and at the suggestion of her brother, who lived in Portland, she decided to take Frank out of school for at least one year, and allow him but two hours each day for study. Perhaps some of our young readers would have been very much pleased at the thought of so long a respite from the tiresome duties of school; but it was a severe blow to Frank. A few more months, he was confident, would have carried him ahead of all competitors. But he always submitted to his mother's requirements, no matter how much at variance with his own wishes, without murmuring; and when the spring term was ended he took his books under his arm, and bade a sorrowful farewell to his much-loved school-room.

It is June, and as Frank has been out of school almost two months, things begin to wear their old, accustomed look again. The young naturalist's home, as his schoolmates were accustomed to say, is a "regular curiosity shop." Perhaps, reader,

if we take a stroll about the premises, we can find something to interest us.

Frank's room, which he called his "study," is in the south wing of the cottage. It has two windows, one looking out toward the road, and the other covered with a thick blind of climbing roses, which almost shut out the light. A book-case stands beside one of the windows, and if you were to judge from the books it contained, you would pronounce Frank quite a literary character. The two upper shelves are occupied by miscellaneous books, such as Cooper's novels, Shakspeare's works, and the like. On the next two shelves stand Frank's choicest books—natural histories; there are sixteen large volumes, and he knows them almost by heart. The drawers in the lower part of the case are filled on one side with writing materials, and on the other with old compositions, essays, and orations, some of which exhibit a power of imagination and a knowledge of language hardly to be expected in a boy of Frank's age. On the top of the case, at either end, stand the busts of Clay and Webster, and between them are two relics of Revolutionary times, a sword and musket crossed, with the words "Bunker Hill" printed on a slip of paper fastened to them. On the opposite side of the room stands a bureau, the drawers of which are filled with clothing, and on the top are

placed two beautiful specimens of Frank's handiwork. One is a model of a "fore-and-aft" schooner, with whose rigging or hull the most particular tar could not find fault. The other represents a "scene at sea." It is inclosed in a box about two feet long and a foot and a half in hight. One side of the box is glass, and through it can be seen two miniature vessels. The craft in the foreground would be known among sailors as a "Jack." She is neither a brig nor a bark, but rather a combination of both. She is armed, and the cannon can be seen protruding from her port-holes. Every sail is set, and she seems to be making great exertion to escape from the other vessel, which is following close in her wake. The flag which floats at her peak, bearing the sign of the "skull and cross-bones," explains it all: the "Jack" is a pirate; and you could easily tell by the long, low, black hull, and tall, raking masts that her pursuer is a revenue cutter. The bottom of the box, to which the little vessels are fastened in such a manner that they appear to "heel" under the pressure of their canvas, is cut out in little hollows, and painted blue, with white caps, to resemble the waves of the ocean; while a thick, black thunder-cloud, which is painted on the sides of the box, and appears to be rising rapidly, with the lightning playing around its ragged edges, adds greatly to the effect of the scene.

At the north end of the room stands a case, similar to the one in which Frank keeps his books, only it is nearly twice as large. It is filled with stuffed "specimens"—birds, nearly two hundred in number. There are bald eagles, owls, sparrows, hawks, cranes, crows, a number of different species of ducks, and other water-fowl; in short, almost every variety of the feathered creation that inhabited the woods around Lawrence is here represented.

At the other end of the room stands a bed concealed by curtains. Before it is a finely carved wash-stand, on which are a pitcher and bowl, and a towel nicely folded lies beside them. In the corner, at the foot of the bed, is what Frank called his "sporting cabinet." A frame has been erected by placing two posts against the wall, about four feet apart; and three braces, pieces of board about six inches wide, and long enough to reach from one post to the other, are fastened securely to them. On the upper brace a fine jointed fish-pole, such as is used in "heavy" fishing, protected by a neat, strong bag of drilling, rests on hooks which have been driven securely into the frame; and from another hook close by hangs a large fish-basket which Frank, who is a capital fisherman, has often brought in filled with the captured denizens of the river or some favorite trout-stream. On the next lower brace hang

a powder-flask and shot-pouch and a double-barrel shot-gun, the latter protected from the damp and dust by a thick, strong covering. On the lower brace hang the clothes the young naturalist always wears when he goes hunting or fishing—a pair of sheep's-gray pantaloons, which will resist water and dirt to the last extremity, a pair of long boots, a blue flannel-shirt, such as is generally worn by the sailors, and an India-rubber coat and cap for rainy weather. A shelf has been fastened over the frame, and on this stands a tin box, which Frank calls his "fishing-box." It is divided into apartments, which are filled with fish-hooks, sinkers, bobbers, artificial flies, spoon-hooks, reels, and other tackle, all kept in the nicest order.

Frank had one sister, but no brothers. Her name was Julia. She was ten years of age; and no boy ever had a lovelier sister. Like her brother, she was unyielding in perseverance, but kind and trusting in disposition, willing to be told her faults that she might correct them. Mrs. Nelson was a woman of good, sound sense; always required implicit obedience of her children; never flattered them, nor allowed others to do so if she could prevent it. The only other inmate of the house was Aunt Hannah, as the children called her. She had formerly been a slave in Virginia, and, after years of toil, had succeeded in laying by sufficient money to purchase her freedom. We

have already spoken of Frank's dog; but were we to allow the matter to drop here it would be a mortal offense in the eyes of the young naturalist, for Bravo held a very prominent position in his affections. He was a pure-blooded Newfoundland, black as jet, very active and courageous, and there was nothing in the hunting line that he did not understand; and it was a well-established saying among the young Nimrods of the village, that Frank, with Bravo's assistance, could kill more squirrels in any given time than any three boys in Lawrence.

CHAPTER II.

An Ugly Customer.

DIRECTLY behind the cottage stands a long, low, neatly constructed building, which is divided by partitions into three rooms, of which one is used as a wood-shed, another for a carpenter's shop, and the third is what Frank calls his "museum." It contains stuffed birds and animals, souvenirs of many a well-contested fight. Let us go and examine them. About the middle of the building is the door which leads into the museum, and, as you enter, the first object that catches your eye is a large wild-cat, crouched on a stand which is elevated about four feet above the floor, his back arched, every hair in his body sticking toward his head, his mouth open, displaying a frightful array of teeth, his ears laid back close to his head, and his sharp claws spread out, presenting altogether a savage appearance; and you are glad that you see him dead and stuffed, and

not alive and running at liberty in the forest in the full possession of strength. But the young naturalist once stood face to face with this ugly customer under very different circumstances.

About forty miles north of Lawrence lives an old man named Joseph Lewis. He owns about five hundred acres of land, and in summer he "farms it" very industriously; but as soon as the trapping season approaches he leaves his property to the care of his hired men, and spends most of the time in the woods. About two-thirds of his farm is still in its primeval state, and bears, wild-cats, and panthers abound in great numbers. The village boys are never more delighted than when the winter vacation comes, and they can gain the permission of their parents to spend a fortnight with "Uncle Joe," as they call him.

The old man is always glad to see them, and enlivens the long winter evenings with many a thrilling story of his early life. During the winter that had just passed, Frank, in company with his cousin Archie Winters, of whom more hereafter, paid a visit to Uncle Joe. One cold, stormy morning, as they sat before a blazing fire, cracking hickory-nuts, the farmer burst suddenly into the house, which was built of logs, and contained but one room, and commenced taking down his rifle.

"What's the matter, Uncle Joe?" inquired Archie.

"Matter!" repeated the farmer; "why, some tarnal varmint got into my sheep-pen last night, and walked off with some of my mutton. Come," he continued, as he slung on his bullet-pouch, "let's go and shoot him."

Frank and Archie were ready in a few minutes; and, after dropping a couple of buck-shot into each barrel of their guns, followed the farmer out to the sheep-pen. It was storming violently, and it was with great difficulty that they could find the "varmint's" track. After half an hour's search, however, with the assistance of the farmer's dogs, they discovered it, and began to follow it up, the dogs leading the way. But the snow had fallen so deep that it almost covered the scent, and they frequently found themselves at fault. After following the track for two hours, the dogs suddenly stopped at a pile of hemlock-boughs, and began to whine and scratch as if they had discovered something.

"Wal," said Uncle Joe, dropping his rifle into the hollow of his arm, "the hounds have found some of the mutton, but the varmint has took himself safe off."

The boys quickly threw aside the boughs, and in a few moments the mangled remains of one of the sheep were brought to light. The thief had probably had more than enough for one meal, and had hidden the surplus carefully away, intending,

no doubt, to return and make a meal of it when food was not quite so plenty.

"Wal, boys," said the farmer, "no use to try to foller the varmint any further. Put the sheep back where you found it, and this afternoon you can take one of your traps and set it so that you can ketch him when he comes back for what he has left." So saying, he shouldered his rifle and walked off, followed by his hounds.

In a few moments the boys had placed every thing as they had found it as nearly as possible, and hurried on after the farmer.

That afternoon, after disposing of an excellent dinner, Frank and Archie started into the woods to set a trap for the thief. They took with them a large wolf-trap, weighing about thirty pounds. It was a "savage thing," as Uncle Joe said, with a powerful spring on each side, which severely taxed their united strength in setting it; and its thick, stout jaws, which came together with a noise like the report of a gun, were armed with long, sharp teeth; and if a wolf or panther once got his foot between them, he might as well give up without a struggle. Instead of their guns, each shouldered an ax. Frank took possession of the trap, and Archie carried a piece of heavy chain with which to fasten the "clog" to the trap. Half an hour's walk brought them to the place where the wild-cat had buried his plunder. After

considerable exertion they succeeded in setting the trap, and placed it in such a manner that it would be impossible for any animal to get at the sheep without being caught. The chain was then fastened to the trap, and to this was attached the clog, which was a long, heavy limb. Trappers, when they wish to take such powerful animals as the bear or panther, always make use of the clog. They never fasten the trap to a stationary object. When the animal finds that he is caught, his first impulse is to run. The clog is not heavy enough to hold him still, but as he drags it through the woods, it is continually catching on bushes and trees, and retarding his progress. But if the animal should find himself unable to move at all, his long, sharp teeth would be put to immediate use, and he would hobble off on three feet, leaving the other in the trap.

After adjusting the clog to their satisfaction, they threw a few handfuls of snow over the trap and chain, and, after bestowing a few finishing touches, they shouldered their axes and started toward the house. The next morning, at the first peep of day, Frank and Archie started for the woods, with their dogs close at their heels. As they approached the spot where the trap had been placed they held their guns in readiness, expecting to find the wild-cat secure. But they were disappointed; every thing was just as they

nad left it, and there were no signs of the wild-cat having been about during the night. Every night and morning for a week they were regular in their visits to the trap, but not even a twig had been moved. Two weeks more passed, and during this time they visited the trap but once. At length the time allotted for their stay at Uncle Joe's expired. On the evening previous to the day set for their departure, as they sat before the huge, old-fashioned fireplace, telling stories and eating nuts, Uncle Joe suddenly inquired, "Boys, did you bring in your trap that you set for that wild-cat?"

They had not thought of it; they had been hunting nearly every day, enjoying rare sport, and they had entirely forgotten that they had a trap to look after.

"We shall be obliged to let it go until to-morrow," said Frank.

And the next morning, as soon as it was light, he was up and dressed, and shouldering an ax, set out with Brave as a companion, leaving Archie in a sound sleep. It was very careless in him not to take his gun—a "regular boy's trick," as Uncle Joe afterward remarked; but it did not then occur to him that he was acting foolishly; and he trudged off, whistling merrily. A few moments' rapid walking brought him to the place where the trap had been set. How he started! There lay the re

mains of the sheep all exposed. The snow near it was saturated with blood, and the trap, clog, and all were gone. What was he to do? He was armed with an ax, and he knew that with it he could make but a poor show of resistance against an enraged wild animal; and he knew, too, that one that could walk off with fifty pounds fast to his leg would be an ugly customer to handle. He had left Brave some distance back, digging at a hole in a stump where a mink had taken refuge, and he had not yet come up. If the Newfoundlander had been by his side he would have felt comparatively safe. Frank stood for some minutes undecided how to act. Should he go back to the house and get assistance? Even if he had concluded to do so he would not have considered himself a coward; for, attacking a wounded wildcat in the woods, with nothing but an ax to depend on, was an undertaking that would have made a larger and stronger person than Frank hesitate. Their astonishing activity and strength, and wonderful tenacity of life, render them antagonists not to be despised. Besides, Frank was but a boy, and although strong and active for his age, and possessing a good share of determined courage that sometimes amounted almost to rashness, it must be confessed that his feelings were not of the most enviable nature. He had not yet discovered the animal, but he knew that he could

not be a great distance off, for the weight of the trap and clog would retard him exceedingly; and he judged, from the appearance of things, that he had not been long in the trap; perhaps, at that very moment, his glaring eyes were fastened upon him from some neighboring thicket.

But the young naturalist was not one to hesitate long because there was difficulty or danger before him. He had made up his mind from the first to capture that wild-cat if possible, and now the opportunity was fairly before him. His hand was none of the steadiest as he drew off his glove and placed his fingers to his lips; and the whistle that followed was low and tremulous, very much unlike the loud, clear call with which he was accustomed to let Brave know that he was wanted; and he hardly expected that the dog would hear it. A faint, distant bark, however, announced that the call had been heard, and in a few moments Frank heard Brave's long-measured bounds as he dashed through the bushes; and when the faithful animal came in sight, he felt that he had a friend that would stand by him to the last extremity. At this juncture Frank was startled by a loud rattling in the bushes, and the next moment the wild-cat sprang upon a fallen log, not half a dozen rods from the place where he was standing, and, growling fiercely, crouched and lashed

his sides with his tail as if about to spring toward him. The trap hung from one of his hind-legs; but by some means he had relieved himself of the clog and chain, and he moved as if the weight of the trap were no inconvenience whatever. The young naturalist was frightened indeed, but bravely stood his ground, and clutched his ax desperately. What would he not have given to have had his trusty double-barrel in his hands! But he was not allowed much time for reflection. Brave instantly discovered the wild-cat, and sprang toward him, uttering an angry growl. Frank raised his ax and rushed forward to his assistance, and cheered on the dog with a voice which, to save his life, he could not raise above a whisper. The wild-cat crouched lower along the log, and his actions seemed to indicate that he intended to show fight. Brave's long, eager bounds brought him nearer and nearer to his enemy. A moment more and he could have seized him; but the wild-cat suddenly turned and sprang lightly into the air, and, catching his claws into a tree that stood full twenty feet distant, ascended it like a streak of light; and, after settling himself between two large limbs, glared down upon his foes as if he were already ashamed of having made a retreat, and had half a mind to return and give them battle. Brave reached the log just a moment too late, and

finding his enemy fairly out of his reach, he quietly seated himself at the foot of the tree and waited for Frank to come up.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the young naturalist, wiping his forehead with his coat-sleeve, (for the exciting scene through which he had just passed had brought the cold sweat from every pore in his body); "it is a lucky circumstance for you and me, Brave, that the varmint did not stand and show fight."

Then ordering the dog to "sit down and watch him," the young naturalist threw down his ax, and started toward the house for his gun. He was still very much excited, fearful that the wild-cat might take it into his head to come down and give the dog battle, in which case he would be certain to escape; for, although Brave was a very powerful and courageous dog, he could make but a poor show against the sharp teeth and claws of the wild-cat. The more Frank thought of it, the more excited he became, and the faster he ran. In a very few moments he reached the house, and burst into the room where Uncle Joe and Archie and two or three hired men sat at breakfast Frank seemed not to notice them, but made straight across the room toward the place where his shot-gun hung against the wall, upsetting chairs in his progress, and creating a great confusion.

"What in tarnation is the matter?" exclaimed the farmer, rising to his feet.

"I've found the wild-cat," answered Frank, in a scarcely audible voice.

"What's that?" shouted Archie, springing to his feet, and upsetting his chair and coffee-cup.

But Frank could not wait to answer. One bound carried him across the floor and out of the door, and he started across the field at the top of his speed, dropping a handful of buck-shot into each barrel of his gun as he went. It was not until Frank had left the house that Archie, so to speak, came to himself. He had been so astonished at his cousin's actions and the announcement that he had "found the wild-cat," that he seemed to be deprived of action. But Frank had not made a dozen steps from the house before Archie made a dash for his gun, and occasioned a greater uproar than Frank had done; and, not stopping to hear the farmer's injunction to "be careful," he darted out the door, which Frank in his hurry had left open, and started toward the woods at a rate of speed that would have done credit to a larger boy than himself. But Frank gained rapidly on him; and when he reached the tree where the wild-cat had taken refuge, Archie was full twenty rods behind. He found that the animals had not changed their positions. The wild-cat was glaring fiercely down upon the dog as if

endeavoring to look him out of countenance; and Brave, seated on his haunches, with his head turned on one side, and his tongue hanging out of the side of his mouth, was steadily returning the gaze. Frank took a favorable position at a little distance from the foot of the tree, and cocking both barrels, so as to be ready for any emergency, in case the first should not prove fatal, raised his gun to his shoulder, and glancing along the clean, brown tube, covered one of the wild-cat's eyes with the fatal sight, and pressed the trigger. There was a sharp report, and the animal fell from his perch stone-dead. At this moment Archie came up. After examining their prize to their satisfaction, the boys commenced looking around through the bushes to find the clog which had been detached from the trap. After some moments' search they discovered it; and Archie unfastened the chain, and shouldering the ax and guns, he started toward the house. Frank followed after, with the wild-cat on his shoulder, the trap still hanging to his leg. The skin was carefully taken off; and when Archie and Frank got home, they stuffed it, and placed it as we now see it.

CHAPTER III.

The Museum.

LET us now proceed to examine the other objects in the museum. A wide shelf, elevated about four feet above the floor, extends entirely around the room, and on this the specimens are mounted. On one side of the door stands a tall, majestic elk, with his head thrown forward, and his wide-spreading antlers lowered, as if he meant to dispute our entrance. On the opposite side is a large black fox, which stands with one foot raised and his ears thrown forward, as if listening to some strange sound. This is the same fox which so long held possession of Reynard's Island; and the young naturalist and his cousin were the ones who succeeded in capturing him. The next two scenes are what Frank calls his "masterpieces." The first is a large buck, running for dear life, closely followed by a pack of gaunt, hungry wolves, five in number, with their sharp-pointed ears laid back

close to their heads, their tongues hanging out of their mouths, and their lips spotted with foam The flanks of the buck are dripping with blood from wounds made by their long teeth. In the next scene the buck is at bay. Almost tired out, or, perhaps, too closely pressed by his pursuers, he has at length turned furiously upon them, to sell his life as dearly as possible. Two of the wolves are lying a little distance off, where they have been tossed by the powerful buck, one dead, the other disabled; and the buck's sharp antlers are buried deep in the side of another, which had attempted to seize him.

Well may Frank be proud of these specimens, for they are admirably executed. The animals are neatly stuffed, and look so lifelike and the positions are so natural, that you could almost fancy that you hear the noise of the scuffle. The next scene represents an owl, which, while engaged in one of his nocturnal plundering expeditions, has been overtaken by daylight, and not being able to reach his usual hiding-place, he has taken refuge in a clump of bushes, where he has been discovered by a flock of his inveterate enemies, the crows. The owl sits upon his perch, glaring around with his great eyes, while his tormentors surround him on all sides, their mouths wide open, as if reviling their enemy with all their might. The next scene represents a flock of ducks sport-

ing in the water, and a sly old fox, concealed behind the trunk of a tree close by, is watching their motions, evidently with the intention of "bagging" one of them for his supper. In the next scene he is running off, at full speed, with one of the ducks thrown over his shoulder; and the others, with their mouths open as if quacking loudly, are just rising from the water. In the next scene is a large black wolf, which has just killed a lamb, and crouches over it with open mouth, as if growling fiercely at something which is about to interrupt his feast. The next scene represents a fish-hawk, which has just risen from the lake, with a large trout struggling in his talons; and just above him is a bald-eagle, with his wings drawn close to his body, in the act of swooping down upon the fish-hawk, to rob him of his hard-earned booty. In the next scene a raccoon is attempting to seize a robin, which he has frightened off her nest. The thief had crawled out on the limb on which the nest was placed, intending, no doubt, to make a meal of the bird; but mother Robin, ever on the watch, had discovered her enemy, and flown off just in time to escape. The next scene is a large "dead-fall" trap, nicely set, with the bait placed temptingly within; and before it crouches a sleek marten, peeping into it as if undecided whether to enter or not.

All these specimens have been cured and stuffed by Frank and Archie; and, with the exception of the deer and wolves, they had killed them all. The latter had been furnished by Archie's father. The boys had never killed a deer, and he had promised to take them, during the coming winter, with him up into the northern part of the state, where they would have an opportunity of trying their skill on the noble game.

But the museum is not the only thing that has given Frank the name of the "young naturalist." He is passionately fond of pets, and he has a pole shanty behind the museum, which he keeps well stocked with animals and birds. In one cage he has a young hawk, which he has just captured; in another, a couple of squirrels, which have become so tame that he can allow them to run about the shanty without the least fear of their attempting to escape. Then he has two raccoons, several pigeons, kingbirds, quails, two young eagles, and a fox, all undergoing a thorough system of training. But his favorite pets are a pair of kingbirds and a crow, which are allowed to run at large all the time. They do not live on very good terms with each other. In their wild state they are enemies, and each seems to think the other has no business about the cottage; and Frank has been the unwilling witness to many a desperate fight between them, in which the poor

crow always comes off second best. Then, to console himself, he will fly upon Frank's shoulder, cawing with all his might, as if scolding him for not lending some assistance. To make amends for his defeat, Frank gives him a few kernels of corn, and then shows him a hawk sailing through the air; and Sam, as he calls the crow, is off in an instant, and, after tormenting the hawk until he reaches the woods, he will always return.

Not a strange bird is allowed to come about the cottage. The kingbirds, which have a nest in a tree close by the house, keep a sharp look-out; and hawks, eagles, crows, and even those of their own species, all suffer alike. But now and then a spry little wren pays a visit to the orchard, and then there is sport indeed. The wren is a great fighting character, continually getting into broils with the other birds, and he has no notion of being driven off; and, although the kingbirds, with Sam's assistance, generally suceeed in expelling the intruder, it is only after a hard fight.

Directly opposite the door that opens into the museum is another entrance, which leads into a room which Frank calls his shop. A work-bench has been neatly fitted up in one corner, at the end of which stands a large chest filled with carpenter's tools. On the bench are several half-finished specimens of Frank's skill—a jointed fish-pole, two or three finely-shaped hulls, and a miniature

frigate, which he is making for one of his friends. The shop and tools are kept in the nicest order, and Frank spends every rainy day at his bench.

The young naturalist is also a good sailor, and has the reputation of understanding the management of a sail-boat as well as any other boy in the village. He has two boats, which are in the creek, tied to the wharf in front of the house. One of them is a light skiff, which he frequently uses in going to and from the village and on his fishing excursions, and the other is a scow, about twenty feet long and six feet wide, which he built himself. He calls her the Speedwell. He has no sail-boat, but he has passed hour after hour trying to conjure up some plan by which he might be enabled to possess himself of one. Such a one as he wants, and as most of the village have, would cost fifty dollars. Already he has laid by half that amount; but how is he to get the rest? He has begun to grow impatient. The yachting season has just opened; every day the river is dotted with white sails; trials of speed between the swiftest sailers come off almost every hour, and he is obliged to stand and look on, or content himself with rowing around in his skiff. It is true he has many friends who are always willing to allow him a seat in their boats, but that does not satisfy him. He has determined to have a yacht of his own, if there is any honest way for

him to get it. For almost a year he has carefully laid aside every penny, and but half the necessary sum has been saved. How to get the remainder is the difficulty. He never asks his mother for money; he is too independent for that; besides, he has always been taught to rely on his own resources, and he has made up his mind that, if he can not *earn* his boat, he will go without it.

Three or four days after the commencement of our story, Frank might have been seen, about five o'clock one pleasant morning, seated on the wharf in front of the house, with Brave at his side. The question how he should get his boat had been weighing heavily upon his mind, and he had come to the conclusion that something must be done, and that speedily.

"Well," he soliloquized, "my chance of getting a sail-boat this season is rather slim, I'm afraid. But I've made up my mind to have one, and I won't give it up now. Let me see! I wonder how the Sunbeam [meaning his skiff] would sail? I mean to try her. No," he added, on second thought, "she could n't carry canvas enough to sail with one of the village yachts. I have it!" he exclaimed at length, springing to his feet. "The Speedwell! I wonder if I could n't make a sloop of her. At any rate, I will get her up into my shop and try it."

Frank, while he was paying a visit to his cousin in Portland, had witnessed a regatta, in which the Peerless, a large, schooner-rigged scow, had beaten the swiftest yachts of which the city boasted; and he saw no reason why his scow could not do the same. The idea was no sooner conceived than he proceeded to put it into execution. He sprang up the bank, with Brave close at his heels, and in a few moments disappeared in the wood-shed. A large wheelbarrow stood in one corner of the shed, and this Frank pulled from its place, and, after taking off the sides, wheeled it down to the creek, and placed it on the beach, a little distance below the wharf. He then untied the painter—a long rope by which the scow was fastened to the wharf—and drew the scow down to the place where he had left the wheelbarrow. He stood for some moments holding the end of the painter in his hand, and thinking how he should go to work to get the scow, which was very heavy and unwieldy, upon the wheelbarrow. But Frank was a true Yankee, and fruitful in expedients, and he soon hit upon a plan, which he was about putting into execution, when a strong, cheery voice called out:

"Arrah, me boy! What 'll yer be after doing with the boat?"

Frank looked up and saw Uncle Mike, as the boys called him—a good-natured Irishman, who

lived in a small rustic cottage not far from Mrs Nelson's—coming down the bank.

"Good morning, Uncle Mike," said Frank, politely accepting the Irishman's proffered hand and shaking it cordially. "I want to get this scow up to my shop; but I'm afraid it is a little too heavy for me to manage."

"So it is, intirely," said Mike, as he divested himself of his coat, and commenced rolling up his shirt-sleeves. "Allow me to lend yer a helpin' hand." And, taking the painter from Frank's hand, he drew the scow out of the water, high upon the bank. He then placed his strong arms under one side of the boat, and Frank took hold of the other, and, lifting together, they raised it from the ground, and placed it upon the wheelbarrow. "Now, Master Frank," said Mike, "if you will take hold and steady her, I'll wheel her up to the shop for you."

Frank accordingly placed his hands upon the boat in such a manner that he could keep her steady and assist Mike at the same time; and the latter, taking hold of the "handles," as he termed them, commenced wheeling her up the bank. The load was heavy, but Mike was a sturdy fellow, and the scow was soon at the door of the shop. Frank then placed several sticks of round wood, which he had brought out of the wood-shed, upon the

ground, about three feet apart, to serve as rollers, and, by their united efforts, the Speedwell was placed upon her side on these rollers, and in a few moments was left bottom upward on the floor of the shop.

CHAPTER IV.

A Race on the Water.

A WEEK passed, and the Speedwell again rode proudly at her moorings, in front of the cottage; but her appearance was greatly changed. A "center-board" and several handy lockers had been neatly fitted up in her, and her long, low hull painted black on the outside and white on the inside; and her tall, raking mast and faultless rigging gave her quite a ship-like appearance.

Frank had just been putting on a few finishing touches, and now stood on the wharf admiring her. It was almost night, and consequently he could not try her sailing qualities that day; and he was so impatient to discover whether or not he had made a failure, that it seemed impossible for him to wait.

While he was thus engaged, he heard the splashing of oars, and, looking up, discovered two boys rowing toward him in a light skiff. As they ap-

proached, he recognized George and Harry Butler, two of his most intimate acquaintances. They were brothers, and lived about a quarter of a mile from Mrs. Nelson's, but they and Frank were together almost all the time. Harry, who was about a year older than Frank, was a very impulsive fellow, and in a moment of excitement often said and did things for which he felt sorry when he had time to think the matter over; but he was generous and good-hearted, and if he found that he had wronged any one, he never failed to make ample reparation. George, who was just Frank's age, was a jolly, good-natured boy, and would suffer almost any indignity rather than retaliate.

"Well, Frank," said Harry, as soon as they came within speaking distance, "George and I wanted a little exercise, so we thought we would row up and see what had become of you. Why don't you come down and see a fellow? Hallo!" he exclaimed, on noticing the change in the Speedwell's appearance, "what have you been trying to do with your old scow?"

"Why, don't you see?" said Frank. "I've been trying to make a yacht out of her."

"How does she sail?" inquired George.

"I don't know. I have just finished her, and have not had time to try her sailing qualities yet."

"I don't believe she will sail worth a row of

pins," said Harry, confidently, as he drew the skiff alongside the Speedwell, and climbed over into her. "But I 'll tell you what it is," he continued, peeping into the lockers and examining the rigging, "you must have had plenty of hard work to do in fixing her over. You have really made a nice boat out of her."

"Yes, I call it a first-rate job," said George. "Did you make the sails yourself, Frank?"

"Yes," answered Frank. "I did all the work on her. She ought to be a good sailer, after all the trouble I 've had. How would you like to spend an hour with me on the river to-morrow? You will then have an opportunity to judge for yourself."

The boys readily agreed to this proposal, and, after a few moments' more conversation, they got into their skiff and pulled down the creek. The next morning, about four o'clock, Frank awoke, and he had hardly opened his eyes before he was out on the floor and dressing. He always rose at this hour, both summer and winter; and he had been so long in the habit of it, that it had become a kind of second nature with him. Going to the window, he drew aside the curtain and looked out. The Speedwell rode safely at the wharf, gallantly mounting the swells which were raised by quite a stiff breeze that was blowing directly down the creek. He amused himself for about two hours in

his shop; and after he had eaten his breakfast, he began to get ready to start on the proposed excursion. A large basket, filled with refreshments, was carefully stowed away in one of the lockers of the Speedwell, the sails were hoisted, the painter was cast off, and Frank took his seat at the helm, and the boat moved from the shore "like a thing of life." The creek was too narrow to allow of much maneuvering, and Frank was obliged to forbear judging of her sailing qualities until he should reach the river. But, to his delight, he soon discovered one thing, and that was, that before the wind the Speedwell was no mean sailer. A few moments' run brought him to Mr. Butler's wharf, where he found George and Harry waiting for him. Frank brought the Speedwell around close to the place where they were standing in splendid style, and the boys could not refrain from expressing their admiration at the handsome manner in which she obeyed her helm. They clambered down into the boat, and seated themselves on the middle thwarts, where they could assist Frank in managing the sails, and in a few moments they reached the river.

"There comes Bill Johnson!" exclaimed George, suddenly, "just behind the Long Dock."

The boys looked in the direction indicated, and saw the top of the masts and sails of a boat which

was moving slowly along on the other side of the dock.

"Now, Frank," said Harry, "turn out toward the middle of the river, and get as far ahead of him as you can, and see if we can't reach the island [meaning Strawberry Island] before he does."

Frank accordingly turned the Speedwell's head toward the island, and just at that moment the sail-boat came in sight. The Champion—for that was her name—was classed among the swiftest sailers about Lawrence; in fact, there was no sloop that could beat her. She was a clinker-built boat, about seventeen feet long, and her breadth of beam—that is, the distance across her from one side to the other—was great compared with her length. She was rigged like Frank's boat, having one mast and carrying a mainsail and jib; but as her sails were considerably larger than those of the Speedwell, and as she was a much lighter boat, the boys all expected that she would reach the island, which the young skippers always regarded as "home" in their races, long before the Speedwell. The Champion was sailed by two boys. William Johnson, her owner, sat in the stern steering, and Ben. Lake, a quiet, odd sort of a boy, sat on one of the middle thwarts managing the sails. As soon as she rounded the dock, Harry Butler sprang to his feet, and, seizing

a small coil of rope that lay in the boat, called out,

"Bill! if you will catch this line, we'll tow you."

"No, I thank you," answered William. "I think we can get along very well without any of your help."

"Yes," chimed in Ben. Lake, "and we'll catch you before you are half-way to the island."

"We'll see about that!" shouted George, in reply.

By this time the Speedwell was fairly before the wind, the sails were hauled taut, the boys seated themselves on the windward gunwale, and the race began in earnest. But they soon found that it would be much longer than they had imagined. Instead of the slow, straining motion which they had expected, the Speedwell flew through the water like a duck, mounting every little swell in fine style, and rolling the foam back from her bow in great masses. She was, beyond a doubt, a fast sailer.

George and Harry shouted and hurrahed until they were hoarse, and Frank was so overjoyed that he could scarcely speak.

"How she sails!" exclaimed Harry. "If the Champion beats this, she will have to go faster than she does now."

Their pursuers were evidently much surprised at this sudden exhibition of the Speedwell's "sailing qualities;" and William hauled more to the wind and "crowded" his boat until she stood almost on her side, and the waves frequently washed into her.

"They will overtake us," said Frank, at length; "but I guess we can keep ahead of them until we cross the river."

And so it proved. The Champion began to gain—it was very slowly, but still she did gain—and when the Speedwell had accomplished half the distance across the river, their pursuers were not more than three or four rods behind.

At length they reached the island, and, as they rounded the point, they came to a spot where the wind was broken by the trees. The Speedwell gradually slackened her headway, and the Champion, which could sail much faster than she before a light breeze, gained rapidly, and soon came alongside.

"There is only one fault with your boat, Frank," said William; "her sails are too small. She can carry twice as much canvas as you have got on her now."

"Yes," answered Frank, "I find that I have made a mistake; but the fact is, I did not know how she would behave, and was afraid she would

capsize. My first hard work shall be to make some new sails."

"You showed us a clean pair of heels, any way," said Ben. Lake, clambering over into the Speedwell. "Why, how nice and handy every thing is! Every rope is just where you can lay your hand on it."

"Let 's go ashore and see how we are off for a crop of strawberries," said Harry.

William had pulled down his sails when he came alongside, and while the conversation was going on the Speedwell had been towing the Champion toward the island, and, just as Harry spoke, their bows ran high upon the sand. The boys sprang out, and spent two hours in roaming over the island in search of strawberries; but it was a little too early in the season for them, and, although there were "oceans" of green ones, they gathered hardly a pint of ripe ones.

After they had eaten the refreshments which Frank had brought with him, they started for home. As the wind blew from the main shore, they were obliged to "tack," and the Speedwell again showed some fine sailing, and when the Champion entered the creek, she was not a stone's throw behind.

Frank reached home that night a good deal elated at his success. After tying the Speedwell to the wharf, he pulled down the sails and carried

them into his shop. He had promised, before leaving George and Harry, to meet them at five o'clock the next morning to start on a fishing excursion, and, consequently, could do nothing toward the new sails for his boat for two days.

CHAPTER V.

A Fishing Excursion.

PRECISELY at the time agreed upon, Frank might have been seen sitting on the wharf in front of Mr. Butler's house. In his hand he carried a stout, jointed fish-pole, neatly stowed away in a strong bag of drilling, and under his left arm hung his fish-basket, suspended by a broad belt, which crossed his breast. In this he carried his hooks, reels, trolling-lines, dinner, and other things necessary for the trip. Brave stood quietly by his side, patiently waiting for the word to start. They were not obliged to wait long, for hasty steps sounded on the gravel walk that led up to the house, the gate swung open, and George and Harry appeared, their arms filled with their fishing-tackle.

"You're on time, I see," said Harry, as he climbed down into a large skiff that was tied to the wharf. "Give us your fish-pole."

Frank accordingly handed his pole and basket down to Harry, who stowed them away in the boat. He and George then went into the boat-house, and one brought out a pair of oars and a sail, which they intended to use if the wind should be fair, and the other carried two pails of minnows, which had been caught the night before, to serve as bait.

They then got into the boat, and Frank took one oar and Harry the other, and Brave stationed himself at his usual place in the bow. George took the helm, and they began to move swiftly down the creek toward the river. About a quarter of a mile below the mouth of the creek was a place, covering half an acre, where the water was about four feet deep, and the bottom was covered with smooth, flat stones. This was known as the "black-bass ground," and large numbers of these fish were caught there every season. George turned the boat's head toward this place, and, thrusting his hand into his pocket, drew out a "trolling-line," and, dropping the hook into the water behind the boat, began to unwind the line. The trolling-hook (such as is generally used in fishing for black-bass) can be used only in a strong current, or when the boat is in rapid motion through the water. The hook is concealed by feathers or a strip of red flannel, and a piece of shining metal in the shape of a spoon-bowl is fastened to it in such a manner

as to revolve around it when the hook is drawn rapidly through the water. This is fastened to the end of a long, stout line, and trailed over the stern of the boat, whose motion keeps it near the surface. It can be seen for a great distance in the water, and the fish, mistaking it for their prey, dart forward and seize it.

A few moments' pulling brought them to the bass ground, and George, holding the stick on which the line had been wound in his hand, waited impatiently for a "bite." They had hardly entered the ground when several heavy pulls at the line announced that the bait had been taken. George jerked in return, and, springing to his feet, commenced hauling in the line hand over hand, while whatever was at the other end jerked and pulled in a way that showed that he was unwilling to approach the surface. The boys ceased rowing, and Frank exclaimed,

"You 've got a big one there, George. Don't give him any slack, or you 'll lose him."

"Haul in lively," chimed in Harry. "There he breaches!" he continued, as the fish—a fine bass, weighing, as near as they could guess, six pounds—leaped entirely out of the water in his mad efforts to escape. "I tell you he 's a beauty."

Frank took up the "dip-net," which the boys had used in catching the minnows, and, standing by George's side, waited for him to bring the fish

within reach, so that he might assist in "landing him. The struggle was exciting, but short. The bass was very soon exhausted, and George drew him alongside the boat, in which he was soon safely deposited under one of the seats.

They rowed around the ground for half an hour, each taking his turn at the line, and during that time they captured a dozen fish. The bass then began to stop biting; and Frank, who was at the helm, turned the boat toward the "perch-bed," which was some distance further down the river. It was situated at the outer edge of a bank of weeds, which lined the river on both sides. The weeds sprouted from the bottom in the spring, and by fall they reached the hight of four or five feet above the surface of the water. They were then literally swarming with wild ducks; but at the time of which we write, as it was only the latter part of June, they had not yet appeared above the water. The perch-bed was soon reached, and Harry, who was pulling the bow-oar, rose to his feet, and, raising the anchor, which was a large stone fastened to the boat by a long, stout rope, lifted it over the side, and let it down carefully into the water. The boat swung around until her bow pointed up stream, and the boys found themselves in the right spot to enjoy a good day's sport.

Frank, who was always foremost in such mat-

ters, had his pole rigged in a trice, and, baiting his hook with one of the minnows, dropped it into the water just outside of the weeds. Half a dozen hungry perch instantly rose to the surface, and one of them, weighing nearly a pound, seized the bait and darted off with it, and the next moment was dangling through the air toward the boat.

"That 's a good-sized fish," said Harry, as he fastened his reel on his pole.

"Yes," answered Frank, taking his prize off the hook and throwing it into the boat; "and we shall have fine sport for a little while."

"But they will stop biting when the sun gets a little warmer; so we had better make the most of our time," observed George.

By this time the other boys had rigged their poles, and soon two more large perch lay floundering in the boat. For almost two hours they enjoyed fine sport, as Frank had said they would, and they were too much engaged to think of being hungry. But soon the fish began to stop biting, and Harry, who had waited impatiently for almost five minutes for a "nibble," drew up his line and opened a locker in the stern of the boat, and, taking out a basket containing their dinner, was about to make an inroad on its contents, when he discovered a boat, rowed by a boy about his own age, shoot rapidly around a point that extended for a considerable distance out

into the river, and turn toward the spot where they were anchored.

"Boys," he exclaimed, "here comes Charley Morgan!"

"Charley Morgan," repeated Frank. "Who is he?"

"Why, he is the new-comer," answered George. "He lives in the large brick house on the hill."

Charley Morgan had formerly lived in New York. His father was a speculator, and was looked upon by some as a wealthy man; but it was hinted by those who knew him best that if his debts were all paid he would have but little ready money left. Be that as it may, Mr. Morgan and his family, at any rate, lived in style, and seemed desirous of outshining all their neighbors and acquaintances. Becoming weary of city life, they had decided to move into the country, and, purchasing a fine village lot in Lawrence, commenced building a house upon it. Although the village could boast of many fine dwellings, the one on Tower Hill, owned by Mr. Morgan, surpassed them all, and, as is always the case in such places, every one was eager to discover who was to occupy the elegant mansion. When the house was completed, Mr. Morgan returned to New York to bring on his family, leaving three or four "servants," as he called them, to look after his affairs; and the Julia Burton landed at the wharf, one pleasant

morning, a splendid open carriage, drawn by a span of jet-black horses. The carriage contained Mr. Morgan and his family, consisting of his wife and one son—the latter about seventeen years old. At the time of his introduction to the reader they had been in the village about a week. Charles, by his haughty, overbearing manner, had already driven away from him the most sensible of the village boys who had become acquainted with him; but there are those every-where who seem, by some strange fatality, to choose the most unworthy of their acquaintances for their associates; and there were several boys in Lawrence who looked upon Charles as a first-rate fellow and a very desirable companion.

George and Harry, although they had frequently seen the "new-comer," had not had an opportunity to get acquainted with him; and Frank, who, as we have said, lived in the outskirts of the village, and who had been very busy at work for the last week on his boat, had not seen him at all.

"What sort of a boy is he?" inquired the latter, continuing the conversation which we have so unceremoniously broken off.

"I don't know," replied Harry. "Some of the boys like him, but Ben. Lake says he 's the biggest rascal in the village. He 's got two or three guns, half a dozen fish-poles, and, by what I hear the

boys say, he must be a capital sportsman. But he tells the most ridiculous stories about what he has done."

By this time Charles had almost reached them, and, when he came alongside, he rested on his oars and called out,

"Well, boys, how many fish have you caught?"

"So many," answered George, holding up the string, which contained over a hundred perch and black-bass. "Have you caught any thing?"

"Not much to brag of," answered Charles; "I hooked up a few little perch just behind the point. But that is a tip-top string of yours."

"Yes, pretty fair," answered Harry. "You see we know where to go."

"That does make some difference," said Charles. "But as soon as I know the good places, I'll show you how to catch fish."

"We will show you the good fishing-grounds any time," said George.

"Oh, I don't want any of your help. I can tell by the looks of a place whether there are any fish to be caught or not. But you ought to see the fishing-grounds we have in New York," he continued. "Why, many a time I've caught three hundred in less than half an hour, and some of them would weigh ten pounds."

"Did you catch them with a hook and line?" inquired George.

"Of course I did! What else should I catch them with? I should like to see one of you trying to handle a ten or fifteen-pound fish with nothing but a trout-pole."

"Could you do it?" inquired Harry, struggling hard to suppress a laugh.

"Do it? I *have* done it many a time. But is there any hunting around here?"

"Plenty of it."

"Well," continued Charles, "I walked all over the woods this morning, and could n't find any thing."

"It is not the season for hunting now," said George; "but in the fall there are lots of ducks, pigeons, squirrels, and turkeys, and in the winter the woods are full of minks, and now and then a bear or deer; and the swamps are just the places to kill muskrats."

"I'd just like to go hunting with some of you. I'll bet I can kill more game in a day than any one in the village."

The boys made no reply to this confident assertion, for the fact was that they were too full of laughter to trust themselves to speak.

"I'll bet you have n't got any thing in the village that can come up to this," continued Charles; and as he spoke he raised a light, beautifully-finished rifle from the bottom of the boat, and held it up to the admiring gaze of the boys.

"That is a beauty," said Harry, who wished to continue the conversation as long as possible, in order to hear some more of Charles's "large stories." "How far will it shoot?"

"It cost me a hundred dollars," answered Charles, "and I've killed bears and deer with it, many a time, as far as across this river here."

Charles did not hesitate to say this, for he was talking only to "simple-minded country boys," as he called them, and he supposed he could say what he pleased and they would believe it. His auditors, who before had been hardly able to contain themselves, were now almost bursting with laughter. Frank and George, however, managed to draw on a sober face, while Harry turned away his head and stuffed his handkerchief into his mouth.

"I tell you," continued Charles, not noticing the condition his hearers were in, "I've seen some pretty tough times in my life. Once, when I was hunting in the Adirondack Mountains, in the northern part of Michigan, I was attacked by Indians, and came very near being captured, and the way I fought was a caution to white folks. This little rifle came handy then, I tell you. But I must hurry along now; I promised to go riding with the old man this afternoon."

And he dipped the oars into the water, and the little boat shot rapidly up the river. It was well that he took his departure just as he did, for our

three boys could not possibly have contained themselves a moment longer. They could not wait for him to get out of sight, but, lying back in the boat, they laughed until the tears rolled down their cheeks.

"Well, Frank, what do you think of him?" inquired Harry, as soon as he could speak.

"I think the less we have to do with him the better," answered Frank.

"I did think," said Harry, stopping now and then to indulge in a hearty fit of laughter, "that there might be some good things about him; but a boy that can tell such whopping big lies as he told must be very small potatoes. Only think of catching three hundred fish in less than half an hour, and with only one hook and line! Why, that would be ten every minute, and that is as many as two men could manage. And then for him to talk about that pop-gun of his shooting as far as across this river!—why, it's a mile and a half—and I know it would n't shoot forty rods, and kill. But the best of all was his hunting among the Adirondack Mountains, in Michigan, and having to defend himself against the Indians; that 's a good joke."

And Harry laid back in the boat again, and laughed and shouted until his sides ached.

"He must be a very ungrateful fellow," said Frank, at length. "Did n't you notice how disrespectfully he spoke of his father? He called him

his 'old man.' If I had a father, I'd never speak so lightly of him."

"Yes, I noticed that," said George. "But," he continued, reaching for the basket which Harry, after helping himself most bountifully, had placed on the middle seat, "I'm hungry as blazes, and think I can do justice to the good things mother has put up for us."

After eating their dinner they got out their fishing-tackle again; but the perch had stoppod biting, and, after waiting patiently for half an hour without feeling a nibble, they unjointed their poles, drew up the anchor, and Frank seated himself at the helm, while George and Harry took the oars and pulled toward home.

CHAPTER VI.

The Regulators.

ONE of the range of hills which extended around the western side of the village was occupied by several families, known as the "Hillers." They were ignorant, degraded people, living in miserable hovels, and obtaining a precarious subsistence by hunting, fishing, and stealing. With them the villagers rarely, if ever, had intercourse, and respectable persons seldom crossed their thresholds. The principal man among the Hillers was known as Bill Powell. He was a giant in strength and stature, and used to boast that he could visit "any hen-roost in the village every night in the week, and carry off a dozen chickens each time, without being nabbed." He was very fond of liquor, too indolent to work, and spent most of his time, when out of jail, on the river, fishing, or roaming through the woods with his gun. He had one son, whose

name was Lee, and a smarter boy it was hard to find. He possessed many good traits of character, but, as they had never been developed, it was difficult to discover them. He had always lived in the midst of evil influences, led by the example of a drunken, brutal father, and surrounded by wicked companions, and it is no wonder that his youthful aspirations were in the wrong direction.

Lee and his associates, as they were not obliged to attend school, and were under no parental control, always amused themselves as they saw fit. Most of their time was spent on the river or in the woods, and, when weary of this sport, the orchards and melon-patches around the village, although closely guarded, were sure to suffer at their hands; and they planned and executed their plundering expeditions with so much skill and cunning, that they were rarely detected.

A day or two after the events related in the preceding chapter transpired, Charles Morgan, in company with two or three of his chosen companions, was enjoying a sail on the river. During their conversation, one of the boys chanced to say something about the Hillers, and Charles inquired who they were. His companions gave him the desired information, and ended by denouncing them in the strongest terms.

Charles, after hearing them through, exclaimed, "I 'd just like to catch one of those boys rob-

bing our orchard or hen-roost. One or the other of us would get a pummeling, sure as shooting."

"Yes," said one of the boys, "but, you see, they do not go alone. If they did, it would be an easy matter to catch them. But they all go together, and half of them keep watch, and the rest bag the plunder; and they move around so still that even the dogs don't hear them."

"I should think you fellows here in the village would take the matter into your own hands," said Charles.

"What do you mean?" inquired his companions.

"Why don't you club together, and every time you see one of the Hillers, go to work and thrash him like blazes? I guess, after you had half-killed two or three of them, they would learn to let things alone."

"I guess they would, too," said one of the boys.

"Suppose we get up a company of fifteen or twenty fellows," resumed Charles, "and see how it works. I'll bet my eyes that, after we've whipped half a dozen of them, they won't dare to show their faces in the village again."

"That's the way to do it," said one of the boys. "I'll join the company, for one."

The others readily fell in with Charles's proposal, and they spent some time talking it over and tell-

ing what they intended to do when they could catch the Hillers, when one of the boys suddenly exclaimed,

"I think, after all, that we shall have some trouble in carrying out our plans. Although there are plenty of fellows in the village who would be glad to join the company, there are some who must not know any thing about it, or the fat will all be in the fire."

"Who are they?" demanded Charles.

"Why, there are Frank Nelson, and George and Harry Butler, and Bill Johnson, and a dozen others, who could knock the whole thing into a cocked hat, in less than no time."

"Could they? I'd just like to see them try it on," said Charles, with a confident air. "They would have a nice time of it. How would they go to work?"

"I am afraid that, if they saw us going to whip the Hillers, they would interfere."

"They would, eh? I'd like to see them undertake to hinder us. Can't twenty fellows whip a dozen?"

"I do n't know. Every one calls Frank Nelson and his set the best boys in the village. They never fight if they can help it; but they are plaguy smart fellows, I tell you; and, if we once get them aroused, we shall have a warm time of it. I remember a little circumstance that happened

last winter. We had a fort in the field behind the school-house, and one night we were out there, snowballing, and I saw Frank Nelson handle two of the largest boys in his class. There were about a dozen boys in the fort—and they were the ones that always go with Frank—and all the rest of the school were against them. The fort stood on a little hill, and we were almost half an hour capturing it, and we would n't ever have taken it if the wall had n't been broken down. We would get almost up to the fort, and they would rush out and drive us down again. At last we succeeded in getting to the top of the hill, and our boys began to tumble over the walls, and I hope I may be shot if they did n't throw us out as fast as we could get in, and—"

"Oh, I do n't care any thing about that," interrupted Charles, who could not bear to hear any one but himself praised. "If I had been there, I would have run up and thrown *them* out."

"And you could have done it easy enough," said one of the boys, who had for some time remained silent.

"Frank Nelson and his set are not such great fellows, after all."

"Of course they ain't," said the other. "They feel big enough; but I guess, if we get this company we have spoken of started, and they under-

take to interfere with us, we will take them down a peg or two."

"That's the talk!" said Charles. "I never let any one stop me when I have once made up my mind to do a thing. I would as soon knock Frank Nelson down as any body else."

By this time the boat, which had been headed toward the shore, entered the creek, and Charles drew up to the wharf, and, after setting his companions ashore, and directing them to speak to every one whom they thought would be willing to join the company, and to no one else, he drew down the sails, and pulled up the creek toward the place where he kept his boat.

A week passed, and things went on swimmingly. Thirty boys had enrolled themselves as members of the Regulators, as the company was called, and Charles, who had been chosen captain, had carried out his plans so quietly, that he was confident that no one outside of the company knew of its existence. Their arrangements had all been completed, and the Regulators waited only for a favorable opportunity to carry their plans into execution.

Frank, during this time, had remained at home, working in his garden or shop, and knew nothing of what was going on.

One afternoon he wrote a letter to his cousin

Archie, and, after supper, set out, with Brave at his heels, to carry it to the post-office. He stopped on the way for George and Harry Butler, who were always ready to accompany him. On the steps of the post-office they met three or four of their companions, and, after a few moments' conversation, William Johnson suddenly inquired,

"Have you joined the new society, Frank?"

"What society?"

"Why, the Regulators."

"I don't know what you mean," said Frank.

"Yes, I guess they have managed to keep it pretty quiet," said William. "They don't want any outsiders to know any thing about it. They asked me to join in with them, but I told them that they ought to know better than to propose such a thing to me. Then they tried to make me promise that I wouldn't say any thing about it, but I would make no such promise, for—"

"Why, Bill, what are you talking about?" inquired Harry. "You rattle it off as if we knew all about it."

"Haven't you heard any thing about it, either?" inquired William, in surprise. "I was certain that they would ask you to join. Well, the amount of it is that Charley Morgan and a lot of his particular friends have been organizing a company for the purpose of thrashing the Hillers, and making

them stop robbing hen-roosts and orchards and cutting up such shines."

"Yes," chimed in James Porter, "there are about thirty of them, and they say that they are going to whip the Hillers out of the village."

"Well, that 's news to me," said Frank.

"For my part," said Thomas Benton, "I, of course, know that the Hillers ought to be punished; but I do not think it is the duty of us boys to take the law into our own hands."

"Nor I," said James Porter.

"Well, *I* do," said Harry, who, as we have said, was an impetuous, fiery fellow, "and I believe I will join the Regulators, and help whip the rascals out of the country. They ought, every one of them, to be thrashed for stealing and—"

"Now, see here, Harry," interrupted George. "You know very well that such a plan will never succeed, and it *ought* not to. You have been taught that it is wrong to take things that do not belong to you, but with the Hillers the case is different; their parents teach them to steal, and they are obliged to do it."

"Besides," said Frank, "this summary method of correcting them will not break up their bad habits; kindness will accomplish much more than force."

"Kindness!" repeated Harry, sneeringly; "as if kindness could have any effect on a Hiller!"

"They can tell when they are kindly treated as well as any one else," said George.

"And another thing," said Ben. Lake; "these Regulators must be a foolish set of fellows to suppose that the Hillers are going to stand still and be whipped. I say, as an old sea-captain once said, when it was proposed to take a man-o'-war with a whale-boat, 'I guess it will be a puttering job.'"

"Well," said James, "I shall do all I can to prevent a fight."

"So will I," said Frank.

"*I* won't," said Harry, who, with his arms buried almost to the elbows in his pockets, was striding backward and forward across the steps. "I say the Hillers ought to be thrashed."

"I'm afraid," said William, without noticing what Harry had remarked, "that our interference will be the surest way to bring on a fight; because, after I refused to join the company, they told me that if any of us attempted to defend the Hillers, or break up the company, they would thrash us, too."

"We don't want to break up their company," said Frank, with a laugh. "We must have a talk with them, and try to show them how unreasonable they are."

"Here they come, now," said George, pointing up the road.

The boys looked in the direction indicated, and

saw the Regulators just turning the corner of the street that led to Mr. Morgan's house. They came around in fine order, marching four abreast, and turned up the street that led to the post-office. They had evidently been well drilled, for they kept step admirably.

"They look nice, don't they?" said Ben.

"Yes," answered George; "and if they were enlisted in a good cause, I would off with my hat and give them three cheers."

The Regulators had almost reached the post-office, when they suddenly set up a loud shout, and, breaking ranks, started on a full run down the street. The boys saw the reason for this, when they discovered Lee Powell coming up the road that led from the river, with a large string of fish in his hand. He always had good luck, but he seemed to have been more fortunate than usual, for his load was about as heavy as he could conveniently carry. He walked rapidly along, evidently very much occupied with his own thoughts, when, suddenly, two or three stones came skipping over the ground, and aroused him from his reverie. He looked up in surprise, and discovered that his enemies were so close to him that flight was useless.

The Regulators drew nearer and nearer, and the stones fell thick about the object of their wrath,

until, finally, one struck him on the shoulder, and another knocked his cap from his head.

"I can't stand that," said Frank; and, springing from the steps, he started to the rescue, followed by all of his companions, (except Harry, who still paced the steps), and they succeeded in throwing themselves between Lee and his assailants.

Several of the Regulators faltered on seeing Lee thus defended; but Charles, followed by half a dozen of his "right-hand men," advanced, and attempted to force his way between Frank and his companions.

"Hold on, here!" said Frank, as he gently, but firmly, resisted Charles's attempts to push him aside. "What are you trying to do?"

"What business is that of yours?" answered Charles, roughly, as he continued his efforts to reach Lee. "You question me as if you were my master. Stand aside, if you don't want to get yourself in trouble."

"You don't intend to hurt Lee, do you?"

"Yes, I do. But it's none of your business, any way. Get out of the way!"

"Has he ever done you any harm?"

"It's none of your business, I say!" shouted Charles, now almost beside himself with rage. "And I want you to keep your hands off me!" he continued, as Frank seized his arm, which he had

raised to strike Lee, who stood close behind his protector.

Frank released his hold, and Charles sprang forward again, and, dodging Frank's grasp, slipped under his arm, and attempted to seize the Hiller. But Frank was as quick as a cat in his motions; and, before Charles had time to strike a blow, he seized him with a grip that brought from him a cry of pain, and seated him, unceremoniously, on the ground.

As soon as Charles could regain his feet, he called out,

"Here it is, boys—just as I expected! Never mind the Hiller, but let 's go to work and give the other fellows a thrashing that they won't get over in a month."

And he sprang toward Frank, against whom he seemed to cherish an especial grudge, followed by a dozen Regulators, who brandished their fists as if they intended to annihilate Lee's gallant defenders. But, just as Charles was about to attack Frank, a new actor appeared. Harry Butler, who had greatly changed his mind in regard to "thrashing the Hillers," seeing that the attack was about to be renewed, sprang down the steps, and caught Charles in his arms, and threw him to the ground, like a log.

The others had been no less successful in re-

pulsing their assailants; and, when Charles rose to his feet, he saw three or four of the Regulators, who had followed him to the attack, sprawling on the ground, and the rest retreating precipitately.

"Now," said Harry, "let's stop this. We've had enough of it."

But Charles, and several more of the Regulators, seemed to be of a different opinion, and were about to recommence their hostile demonstrations, when Harry continued,

"We've only been playing with you so far, Charley; so you had better not try to come any more of your Regulator tricks on us. We don't want to fight, but we shall defend ourselves."

"If you had attended to your own affairs, you would not have been obliged to defend yourselves," said Charles, sullenly.

"What sort of fellows do you suppose we are?" said Harry. "If you expected us to stand still and see thirty fellows pitch on one, you are very much mistaken."

"Come, Lee," said Frank, taking the former by the arm, "I guess we can go now. We'll see you out of harm's way."

The crest-fallen Regulators divided right and left, and allowed Frank and his companions to depart, unmolested. They accompanied Lee almost to the miserable hovel he called "home," and,

when about to bid him good-night, he said, with some feeling,

"I'll remember you, boys; and, if it ever comes handy, you will find that Lee Powell has got feelings, as well as any one else."

And he sprang over a fence, and disappeared.

CHAPTER VII.

The Revenge.

WHILE Frank and his companions were accompanying Lee toward home, some of the Regulators were indulging in feelings of the deepest malice; and there were about a dozen of them—Frank's old enemies—who determined that he should not go unpunished. But there were others who began to see how cowardly they had acted in attacking a defenseless boy, for the only reason that he was a bad boy, and to fear that they had lost the good-will of Frank and his associates. The village boys, with a few exceptions, were accustomed to look up to Frank as a sort of leader; not that he aspired to the position, but his generosity, and the easy way he had of settling the disputes that sometimes arose among the boys, had won for him many a fast friend. We have seen, however, that he was not beloved by all; every good boy has his enemies, and Frank, of course, had his

share of them. They were boys who were jealous of him, and hated him because he held a position in the estimation of the village people to which they could not attain. But this class was very small, comprising, as we have said, about a dozen of the Regulators; and, while they were enraged at their defeat, and studying plans for revenge, the others were repenting of their folly, and trying to think of some way by which they might regain their lost reputation.

Charles's overbearing and haughty manner was so different from Frank's kind, obliging ways, that they had already grown tired of his company, and began to think seriously of having nothing more to do with him; and the things that had just transpired served to convince them that the sooner they left him the better.

As soon as Lee and his gallant defenders had disappeared, one of the Regulators remarked,

"Well, boys, I don't call this a paying business, trying to thrash a boy who has done us no harm."

"That's my opinion," said another.

"And I, for one, wish I had kept out of this scrape," said a third.

"So do I," said the one who had first spoken.

"Oh, you begin to back down, do you, you cowards?" exclaimed Charles, who was taken completely by surprise by this sudden change of

affairs. "*I* never give up till I am whipped. If it had n't been for my lame hand, I would have knocked some of those fellows into cocked hats. I'll fix that Frank Nelson, the next time I catch him."

"Why did n't you do it to-night?" inquired one of the boys, sneeringly.

"I've got a lame hand, I tell you," roared the bully; "and I do n't want you to speak to me in that way again; if you do, you and I will have a meeting."

"That would be an unpleasant job for you, to say the least," said one of the boys; "the most of us are heartily sick of your company, and we have been talking, for two or three days, of sending in our resignations. Now, boys," he continued, "this is as good an opportunity as we shall have; so those that won't have any thing more to do with Regulating, say 'I!'"

"I! I!" burst from a score of throats.

"Now," he resumed, turning to Charles, "good-by; and, if you ever wish to recruit another company, you need not call on any of us."

So saying, he walked off, followed by nearly all the Regulators; those who remained were Frank's enemies and rivals.

"Well, boys," said Charles, as soon as the others had gone, "there are a few of us left, and we can annoy the fellows who think they are too

good to associate with us in the worst way. Let us adjourn to our barn, where we can talk the matter over."

A few moments' walk brought them to Mr. Morgan's house, and, when they entered the long carriage-way that led up to the barn, Charles said,

"Now, boys, you stay here, and I'll go in and get a light."

He ran into the house, and soon reappeared with a lantern in each hand, and led the way toward the barn. He unlocked the door, and he and his companions entered; and, after allowing them time to examine, to their satisfaction, the splendid equipage that had attracted so much attention the morning they arrived at the village, Charles proceeded to call the meeting to order.

"Now, boys," said he, "we don't intend to disband, do we?"

"No," answered several.

"Then, the first thing for us to do is to change our name, for we don't want to let those cowardly sneaks that deserted us to-night know any thing about us. What shall we be called?"

Several names were proposed, but they did not suit Charles. At length, one of the boys inquired,

"What name would you like?"

"I think that 'Midnight Rangers' would be a good name for us," answered Charles.

"That's a splendid name!"

"Now," continued Charles, "we must change our plan of operations a little. We must give up the idea of thrashing the Hillers for awhile, because there are not enough of us; but I should like it, if we could go to work and whip every one of those fellows that stuck up for Lee Powell to-night, especially Frank Nelson."

"So would I," answered William Gage, whom Charles looked upon as his 'right-hand man;' "but it would n't do to attempt it, for he has got too many friends. We must shoot his dog, or steal his boat, or do something of that kind. It would plague him more than a dozen whippings."

"That's so!" exclaimed another of the Rangers. "If we could only go up there, some dark night, and steal his scow, and run her out into the river, and burn her, would n't he be mad?"

"Yes," chimed in another, "but it would n't pay even to attempt that. He always keeps his boats chained up, and the noise we would make in getting them loose would be sure to start that dog of his, and then we should have a dusty time, I reckon."

"I guess so, too," said William Gage. "Whatever we do, we must be careful not to start that dog, for he would go through fire and water to catch us; and, if he ever got hold of one of us- -"

And William shrugged his shoulders, significantly.

"Has n't he got an orchard or melon-patch that we could visit?" inquired Charles.

"No," answered one of the Rangers; "but he 's got as nice a strawberry-patch as ever laid outdoors. But it 's a little too early for strawberries."

"Who cares for that?" said Charles. "We do n't go to get the fruit; we only want to pay him for defending the Hiller—meddling with other people's business. It 's too late to do any thing to-night," he added, glancing at his watch, "but let us go there to-morrow night, and pull up every strawberry-plant we can lay our hands on. You know, we can do as much mischief of that kind as we please, and it will all be laid to the Hillers."

"Where shall we meet?" inquired one of the Rangers.

"Come here at precisely seven o'clock; and, remember, do n't lisp a single word to any one about it, for, if you do, we shall be found out."

The Rangers were about to disperse, when one of them suddenly inquired,

"Will not folks mistrust that something is in the wind, if they see us all starting up the road at that time of night?"

"That 's a fact," said William Gage. "Would n't it be a better plan for us to meet in the woods, at

the back of Mrs. Nelson's lot? Let us all be there at eight o'clock; and, if no two of us go in company, no one will be the wiser for it."

"That is the best plan," said Charles. "Now, remember, don't say any thing about it."

"All right!" was the answer; and, in a few moments more, the Rangers were on their way home.

The next evening, at seven o'clock, Charles left his home, and, avoiding the principal streets as much as possible, started toward the place of rendezvous, where he arrived at almost precisely the time agreed upon. He found the Rangers all waiting for him; and, as it was already dark, it was decided to commence operations immediately.

"We want a guide," said Charles, who, of course, was captain of the Rangers. "Who knows exactly where that strawberry-bed lies? for, if we have to fumble about much, we shall start that dog, and then, it strikes me, from what I have seen and heard of him, we shall be in a predicament."

"You may safely bet on that," said one of the boys; "he's a savage fellow."

"And a first-rate watch-dog, too," observed another.

"Well," said Charles, "all we have to do is to move so still that you can't hear a leaf rustle;

but, if we do rouse the dog, let each one grab a stone and let him have it."

"That would only make a bad matter worse," said one.

"I am afraid we shall have more than we bargained for, if we undertake that," remarked another.

"Let the cowards go home, and the rest come with me," said Charles, impatiently. "Bill," he continued, turning to his right-hand man, "can you act as guide?"

"Yes."

"Then, lead on."

William led the way out of the woods, across a narrow meadow, where they came to the fence that inclosed Mrs. Nelson's garden.

"Now, boys," he whispered, "keep still as mice; but, if we do start the dog, don't stop to fight him, but run like white-heads."

The Rangers climbed over the fence, and followed their guide, who threaded his way through the trees and bushes with a skill worthy of a better cause, and a few moments sufficed to bring them to the strawberry-patch.

"Be careful, boys," said Charles, in a low whisper. "Don't leave a single plant in the ground."

The young scapegraces worked with a will, and, in a few moments, the strawberry-bed—which was Frank's pride, next to his museum, and on which

he had expended a great amount of labor—was almost ruined; and so quietly did they proceed in their work of wanton destruction, that Brave, although a very vigilant dog, was not aroused, and the marauders retraced their steps, and reached the woods in safety.

"There," said Charles, at length, "that's what I call doing it up brown. It almost pays off my debts. I don't think they will receive much benefit from those strawberries this year."

"They have got some nice pears," said one of the Rangers, "and when they get ripe, we must plan another expedition."

"That's so," answered Charles. "But we must not forget that we have others to settle with; and we must meet, some time next week, and determine who shall be visited next."

On the following morning, Frank arose, as usual, at four o'clock, and, shouldering his fish-pole, started off through the woods to catch a mess of trout, intending to be back by breakfast-time. But, as the morning was cloudy, the trout bit voraciously, and in the excitement of catching them, he forgot that he was hungry, and it was almost noon before he reached home.

As soon as he entered the house, Aunt Hannah exclaimed,

"Master Frank, you were altogether too good to Lee Powell, the other night."

"What makes you think so?" he inquired.

At this moment Julia, hearing his voice, burst in from the dining-room, exclaiming,

"Frank, the Hillers have robbed your strawberry-patch!"

"Not robbed it, exactly," said his mother, who had followed close after Julia, "but they have completely ruined it. There are not a dozen plants left in the ground."

Frank was so surprised that he could scarcely utter a word; and, hardly waiting to hear what his mother said, he hurried from the house toward the strawberry-patch. It did, indeed, present a strange and desolate appearance. The bed had covered nearly half an acre; and, so well had the Rangers performed their work, that but few plants were left standing. The sight was enough to upset even Frank's well-established patience, and he exclaimed,

"If I had the rascals that did this mischief, I could pay them for it, without troubling my conscience much."

"You must tell Lee Powell, the next time you see him," said Julia, who had followed him, "that he ought not to—"

"Lee did n't do it," said Frank.

"What makes you think so?"

"See here," said Frank, bending over a footprint in the soft earth; "the Hillers all go bare-

foot, and these fellows wore boots. I know who did it, as well as if I had seen them. It was the work of Charles Morgan and a few of his particular friends. They must have been very still about it, for Brave didn't hear them."

"I don't see what object they had in doing it," said Julia.

"I know what they did it for," said Frank; "and if I ever catch— But," he added, checking himself, "there 's no use in grumbling about it; no amount of fretting will repair the damage."

So saying, he led the way toward the house.

It did not take him long to don his working-suit, and, shouldering his hoe, he returned to the strawberry-bed, and, in less than an hour, the plants were all in the ground again.

CHAPTER VIII.

How to Spend the "Fourth."

THAT evening, after supper, Frank retired to his room, and, settling himself in his comfortable arm-chair, was soon deeply interested in one of Bayard Taylor's works. While thus engaged, a light step was heard in the hall, and, afterward, a gentle rap at his door, and Julia came into the room.

"Now, Frank," she began, "I do n't want you to read to-night."

"Why not?" he inquired.

"Why, you know that day after to-morrow is the Fourth of July, and—"

"And you have n't got your fire-works yet?" interrupted Frank.

"That 's it, exactly."

"Well," said her brother, rising to put away his book, "then, I suppose, I shall have to go down to the village and get you some. What do you want?"

"I want all the things that are written down on this paper."

Frank took the paper and read, "Three packs of fire-crackers, four boxes of torpedoes, three Roman candles, half a dozen pin-wheels, and a dozen sky-rockets."

"Whew!" said Frank, as he folded up the paper and put it into his pocket, "that's what I should call going it strong! Well, I'll tell Mr. Sheldon [the store-keeper] to send up all the fire-works he has got."

Julia burst into a loud laugh, and, the next moment, Frank and Brave were out of the gate, on their way to the village.

In the mean time several of Frank's acquaintances had been amusing themselves on the village common with a game of ball. At length it grew too dark for their sport to continue, and one of the boys proposed that they should decide upon some pleasant way of spending the Fourth.

In spite of the humiliating defeat which Charles Morgan and his companions had sustained, they were present; and the former, who had been making every exertion to regain the good-will of the village boys, exclaimed,

"Let's go hunting."

"No, no," shouted several.

"The game in the woods isn't good for anything this time of year, Charley," said James Por-

ter, who, although he cordially disliked Charles, always tried to treat him kindly.

"Who cares for that?" exclaimed Charles, who, having always been accustomed to lead and govern his city associates, could not endure the steadfastness with which these "rude country boys," as he called them, held to their own opinions. Although, during the whole afternoon, he had been endeavoring to work himself into their favor, he was angry, in an instant, at the manner in which they opposed his proposition. He had been considerably abashed at his recent defeat, and he knew that it had humbled him in the estimation of the Rangers, who, although they still "held true" to him, had changed their minds in regard to the prowess of their leader, and began to regard him, as one of them remarked, as a "mere bag of wind."

Charles was not long in discovering this, and he determined to seize the first opportunity that was offered to retrieve his reputation.

Hastily casting his eyes over the group that surrounded him, he discovered that Frank and Harry, the ones he most feared, were still absent. This was exactly what he had wished for. With the assistance of his companions, the Rangers, who, he was confident, would uphold him, he could settle up all old scores, without fear of suffering in return.

Addressing himself to James, he continued, in an insulting tone,

"We don't go to get the game to *eat*, you blockhead, but only for the sport of killing it."

"I know that," answered James, in a mild voice, not the least disconcerted by the other's furious manner; "but would n't it be better to—"

"Shut up!" shouted Charles. "I'll do just as I please. Besides, I never allow any one to dictate to me."

"I did n't intend to dictate at all, Charley. I was going to say—"

"Are you going to keep still," roared the bully, "or shall I make you?"

And he began to advance toward James.

"See here, old fellow," said Ben. Lake, suddenly striding up, and placing himself directly in front of Charles, "do n't begin another fight, now."

"I'll show you whether I will or not!" exclaimed Charles; and, turning to the Rangers, he continued, "Come on, boys! We can have things all our own way now. We 'll see if—"

"Hold on!" shouted William Johnson. "Here comes Frank. Now you had better take yourself off in a hurry."

Charles's hostile demonstrations ceased in an instant; and, hastily whispering a few words to the Rangers, they disappeared.

In a few moments, Frank, accompanied by

George and Harry, arrived, and the boys, in a few words, explained to them what had just happened.

"I hope," said Frank, "that Charley will see, before long, how unreasonably he acts. He makes himself, and every one around him, uncomfortable."

"Well," said James Porter, "all I have got to say is that those fellows who go with him are very foolish. However, we can't help it. But, come," he added, "we were trying to find some pleasant way of spending the Fourth."

"Let's have a picnic on Strawberry Island," said one.

"We want something exciting," said another "Let's have a boat-race."

"Come, Frank," said Ben. Lake, "let's hear what you have got to say. Suggest something."

"Well," answered Frank, who was always ready with some plan for amusement, "I have been thinking, for two or three days, of something which, I believe, will afford us a great deal of sport. In the first place, I suppose, we are all willing to pass part of the day on the river?"

"Yes, of course," answered the boys.

"The next thing," continued Frank, "is to ascertain how many sail-boats we can raise."

"I'll bring mine."

"And mine," called out several voices.

"Oh, that's no way to do business," exclaimed

William Johnson, who always liked to see things go off in order. "Let all those who have boats hold up their hands."

Sixteen hands came up, and Frank said,

"We shall be gone all day, and, of course, we want plenty of provisions."

"Of course."

"Well, then, what I thought of proposing is this: Let us take three or four of the swiftest sailing-boats, and give the provisions into their charge, and call them smugglers, and let the other boats play the part of revenue-cutters, or a blockading squadron, and let the smugglers try to land the provisions on Strawberry Island, without being caught."

"That's capital!" shouted several.

"It's better than shooting game, at this time of year," said one.

"Yes, and being scolded all day by that tyrant," observed another, who had belonged to the Regulators.

"It will take some time to make all our arrangements," said William, "and I move that we adjourn to our house, where we can hold our meeting in order."

This was readily assented to, and William led the way, followed by all the boys, who were highly delighted at Frank's plan of spending the Fourth.

George Butler was speedily chosen president of

the meeting, and, in less than half an hour, their arrangements were completed.

The Speedwell, Champion, and Alert—the latter a fine little schooner, owned by George and Harry—were to act the part of smugglers, and Ben. Lake and Thomas Benton, who had no boats, were chosen by the smugglers to assist them. The provisions, of which each boy was expected to furnish his share, were all to be left at Mr. Butler's boat-house by six o'clock on the following evening, where they were to be taken charge of by the smugglers, of whom Frank was chosen leader. It was also understood that the smugglers were to carry the provisions all in one boat, and were to be allowed to take every possible advantage of the "men-o'-war," and to make every effort to land the provisions on the island.

The other thirteen boats, which were to act as "coast-guards," were to be under the command of Charles Sheldon, a shrewd, cunning fellow, who had the reputation of being able to handle a sail-boat as well as any boy in the village.

The coast-guards were also divided into divisions of three boats each, and a captain was appointed for each division.

These arrangements, as we have said, were speedily completed; and, although the coast-guards were almost wild with delight at the prospect of the exciting times that would occur during

the race, they were confident that the smugglers could be easily caught, and even some of the smugglers themselves seemed to think that their chances of landing the provisions were small indeed.

As the meeting was about to break up, one of the coast-guards exclaimed,

"We'll have easy times catching you smugglers."

"Do you think so?" asked Harry Butler. "It would be funny if you should slip up on it, would n't it?"

"We'll risk that," said another, "for we've got thirteen boats to your three."

"I say, Frank," said Charles Sheldon, "do n't you think we can catch you?"

"Oh, yes," answered Frank, "easily enough, if you only try. Now, boys," he continued, "remember that we want all the refreshments left at Mr. Butler's boat-house, by six o'clock to-morrow evening."

They all promised to be on hand, and the meeting broke up.

But the coast-guards gathered in little knots in front of the house, or walked slowly toward home, talking the matter over, and congratulating themselves on the easy manner in which the capture of the "contrabands" was to be effected.

The smugglers remained together, and, as soon

as the others were out of hearing, George inquired,

"Do you think we can give them the slip?"

"Yes," answered Frank, "I am certain we can. We must not think of beating them in sailing, because there are too many of them, but we must outwit them."

"What do you propose to do?" inquired Ben.

"We must get up in the morning before they do."

"We shall be obliged to get up at twelve o'clock, then," said Thomas.

"I had rather stay up all night than have them beat us," said Harry.

"Well, boys," said George, "you must all come and sleep at our house to-morrow night. Some of us will be sure to wake up early, and, I think, we shall have no trouble in getting the start of the coast-guards."

The boys spent some time in talking over their plans, and, finally, reluctantly separated, and started for home.

CHAPTER IX.

The Coast-guards Outwitted.

ABOUT three o'clock in the afternoon of the following day, Frank bade his mother and sister good-by, and he and Brave got into the Speedwell, and sailed slowly down the creek. He found the Champion already moored at Mr. Butler's dock, and the smugglers were all waiting for him. As soon as he landed, Ben. Lake said,

"Frank, it is a gone case with us. I *know* we shall be caught."

"You think so, do you?" asked Frank, as if not at all concerned.

"Yes, I'm certain of it. I overheard some conversation among the coast-guards, this afternoon, and one of them said that Charley Sheldon would have the whole fleet anchored before the mouth of the creek at half-past two to-morrow morning."

"Besides," said William Johnson, "they are all going to sleep in their boats to-night, and the North Star and Sampson are to act as police."

"And I heard Charley Sheldon say," chimed in Harry, "that strict watch must be kept of the Speedwell, and no attention paid to the other boats."

"That 's all right," said Frank. "I 'm glad of it."

"Why are you?" asked George, in surprise. "You know, we agreed to carry the provisions all in one boat, and yours is the only one that will hold them all."

"I tell you, Frank, we 're gone suckers," said Ben.

"You fellows seem to be pretty well posted as to the coast-guards' intentions," said Frank.

"Yes," said George; "we 've been spying about and playing eavesdroppers all day."

"I have learned one thing to-day," said Frank, "that pleased me very much, and that is that the coast-guards intend to keep spies about the boat-house all night."

"Why does that please you?" inquired Harry. "Do you want them to discover all our plans, so that they may be ready for us?"

"By no means. I 'll risk a good deal that they will not learn more than we want them to know. I 've thought of a way to set them on the wrong

scent, and, from what I have heard, I think it will work first-rate."

"What is it?"

"I'll show you in half a minute," said Frank. "All we have got to do is to fool the spies; then we are all right."

At this moment several boys, belonging to the blockading squadron, entered the boat-house, bringing their refreshments, and this, of course, put a stop to all further conversation between the smugglers.

By six o'clock the last basket of provisions had been brought in, and the coast-guards took their departure, after repeatedly assuring the smugglers that their capture was certain.

The provisions had been brought in twenty medium-sized market-baskets, and one large clothes-basket that belonged to George and Harry, and seven pails. There was, also, a small bag filled with lemons, which had been brought by Charles Sheldon.

The boys stood for some time looking at them without speaking. At length, Thomas Benton said,

"You will have to carry them, Frank. They will make too large a load for either of the other boats."

"I know that," said Frank; "but we must

make the coast-guards think that the Alert is going to carry them."

"How can we manage that?" inquired George.

"Have you got three or four market-baskets, a clothes-basket, one or two pails, and a salt-bag?" asked Frank, without stopping to answer George's question.

"I guess so," said Harry. "I'll go up to the house and see."

He led the way, followed by three or four of the smugglers, and the articles in question were soon brought into the boat-house.

"Now, Bill," said Frank, "you take this salt-bag, if you please, and fill it with smooth, round stones, about the size of lemons."

"All right," answered William, who began to see through the trick.

"Now," continued Frank, "we want some pieces of cloth, large enough to tie over the tops of these baskets and pails."

These were speedily procured, and, in a few moments, William returned with the salt-bag filled with stones.

"Now, tell us what you intend to do," exclaimed Harry, whose patience was well-nigh exhausted.

"We are making some sham provisions," said Frank.

"Oh, yes, I thought so," said Thomas; "but we have n't got pails and baskets enough."

"Oh, that 's nothing," said Frank. "We 'll fill half a dozen of these old bags with shavings, and, as soon as it grows dark, we 'll pull the Alert alongside the wharf, and tumble these sham provisions into her; then we will cover them up with that piece of sail, as if we wanted to keep them dry. We 'll be sure to fool the men-o'-war."

"I do n't exactly see it," said Thomas.

"Why," said Harry, "as soon as we are out of sight, their spies, who are, of course, watching every movement, will go and tell Charley Sheldon that we have got the things stowed away in the Alert."

"That 's very well, as far as you go," said Ben.; "but suppose they should mistrust that something is in the wind, and should go to work and examine the provisions?"

"What if they do?" said Frank. "It will be too dark for them to make much of an examination; and, if they put their hands into the boat, they will feel the baskets and pails there, and will go away satisfied."

The boys now saw through the trick, and there was no longer any feeling of doubt in their minds. They were now as certain of success as they had before been of being captured.

In a few moments the "sham provisions," as

Frank had called them, were all completed, and, placing them where they could be easily taken out, they locked the door, to prevent surprise, and started for the house.

As they were about to enter the gate, George suddenly exclaimed,

"See there!"

The boys looked in the direction George indicated, and saw the blockading squadron, with the exception of two boats, anchored in the creek, just opposite the long dock. The North Star, a fine, swift-sailing little schooner, was anchored near the middle of the stream, and a boy sat in the stern sheets, reading a book. The Sampson, a very large sloop-rigged boat, was standing up the creek, under full sail. These were the "police boats," and they were taking their stations.

"I wonder where the Sampson is going," said Harry.

"She's going to take her station in Duck's Creek," said Ben.

Upon hearing this, Harry's expectations fell again.

"It's no use," he exclaimed. "Charley Sheldon knows too much for us."

"Not a bit," said Frank. "This arrangement is only for to-night. When we get up in the morning, we shall find the boats all out in the river."

This immediately reassured Harry; and, after

watching the Sampson until she disappeared in Duck's Creek, he led the way to the house.

After supper, as soon as it began to grow dark, they proceeded to put their plans into execution; but, before they started, Frank said,

"Now, boys, we must watch and see how the trick takes, for I know that there are spies now around that boat-house. As soon as we get the sham provisions into the boat, one or two of us had better slip down into the willows behind the wharf, and see what course things are going to take."

"Well," said Harry, "suppose you and Bill act as spies."

"Agreed. Come on, but don't act as if you suspected any thing."

And he led the way toward the boat-house.

Two of the boys busied themselves in bringing out the sham provisions, and the others brought the Alert alongside, and fastened her to the dock, in front of the boat-house. Frank and Harry then got down into the boat, and the other boys passed the provisions down to them, and they placed them in such a manner as to take up as much space as possible. They were soon all stowed away, and covered over with a large sail, as if to keep off the dew.

Ben and George then got into a small skiff that lay at the dock, and towed the Alert out into the

middle of the creek, and anchored her. As soon as this was done they returned, and the smugglers began to amuse themselves by pushing each other about the wharf. They all appeared to enter heartily into the sport, and kept nearing the willows which extended along the bank of the creek, close to the wharf, and Frank and William, watching their opportunity, concealed themselves, and the others ran toward the house. They had hardly disappeared, when the smugglers saw several boys steal cautiously around the corner of the boat-house, where they had been concealed, and one of them crept up the bank, to assure himself that the coast was clear, while the others remained in the shadow of the house. The former, who proved to be Charles Sheldon, the commander of the coast-guards, as soon as he had satisfied himself that the smugglers had gone into the house, called out, in a low whisper, to the others, who were the captains of the divisions of the squadron,

"All right, boys; go ahead, but be careful not to make any noise. I didn't see Frank Nelson's dog go into the yard," he continued; "he must be around here somewhere. We must not let him hear us."

Brave *was*, as Charles had said, "around ther somewhere." He was lying by his master's side, among the willows, no doubt wondering at the strange things that were going on, and, well-trained

as he was, it was with great difficulty that Frank could keep him quiet.

The coast-guards crossed the wharf with noiseless steps, and, unfastening the skiff which the smugglers had just used, they climbed down into it, and pushed off toward the Alert. A few strokes brought them alongside of her, and, thrusting their arms under the sail, they began the examination which the smugglers had so much dreaded.

"What do you find?" inquired Charles, who still kept watch at the top of the bank.

"Here are a lot of baskets and pails," said one.

"And here's the large basket that George and Harry brought," said another.

"What are these round things in this bag, I wonder?" said the one who had first spoken.

"Oh, those are the lemons I brought," said Charles.

"Gracious! how hard they are!" continued the boy, trying to dig his fingers into them.

At this, Frank and William, who, of course, had heard every word of the conversation, and had sat fairly trembling with excitement, fearful that their trick would be discovered, could scarcely refrain from laughing outright. Had it been daylight, the ruse of the smugglers would certainly have been detected, but, as it was, the coast-guards never mistrusted that any thing was wrong. The night was rather dark, and the sham provisions were so

neatly tied up, and so carefully stowed away, that the deception was complete.

"I guess they are all here," said one of the boys, at length.

"Well, come ashore, then," said Charles, "and let 's be off."

The boys pulled back to the wharf, and Charles continued,

"I did n't think that the Alert would hold all of the refreshments, did you?"

"No," answered one of the boys, whom the smugglers recognized as James Porter; "I guess it was a tight squeeze; I could hardly get my hand in between the baskets."

"What do you suppose the smugglers intend to do?" inquired another.

"I do n't know," answered Charles, "unless they propose to get up in the morning before we do, and slip over to the island before we know it. I wonder how they felt when they saw us taking our positions."

"But what do you suppose made them put the provisions in the Alert?"

"Oh, I think I can see through that easily enough," said James. "Frank knows that we expected that he was going to carry them over to the island, and he calculates to get us to chase him, and give the Alert a chance to land the provisions.

He is a cunning fellow, but this time we are too sharp for him."

"I wonder why Frank don't send some one out to act as a spy," said Charles.

"I guess he's afraid that he would be taken prisoner."

We may as well state here (and we should have done so before) that it had been agreed that if one side could catch any of the other acting as spies, they were at liberty to hold them as prisoners until the race was over, and that the prisoner should, if required, give his captors all the information possible relative to the movements and plans of his party, and they could also require him to lend assistance in carrying out their own. The prisoner, of course, was allowed the privilege of escaping, if he could.

This *was* the reason why the smugglers had not sent out any spies; and, if the coast-guards had been aware that Frank and William were hidden away in the willows, they could easily have captured them, and, according to the agreement, obliged them to divulge all their plans.

"Well," said Charles, "we don't want any prisoners now, for we know all their plans; but I wanted to catch Frank this morning, for I was afraid he would beat us. If he should find out that this trick was discovered, he would plan another in five minutes. I guess we had better

remain where we are to-night," he continued, "and, at half-past two o'clock, we will pull out into the river, and blockade the creek. All we have to do is to take care of the Alert, and let the other boats do as they please. But we had better be off, or the smugglers may slip out and make some of us prisoners."

And the spies departed as cautiously and quickly as they had come.

As soon as they had gone, the smugglers arose from their places of concealment, and stole into the house, and acquainted the other boys with the success of their stratagem.

After enjoying a hearty laugh at the expense of the coast-guards, led by George and Harry, they ran up stairs into the "large chamber," a room containing three beds, and they were soon snug between the sheets. But sleep was, for a long time, out of the question; they laughed and talked until their jaws ached, and the hands of the old clock that stood in the room pointed to twelve; then they allowed their tired tongues to rest, and lay for a long time, each occupied with his own thoughts, and, finally, one after the other fell asleep.

The hours passed on, and nothing was heard but their gentle breathing. Suddenly Harry, who always talked in his sleep when any thing exciting was going on, turned over in bed with a jerk, and

began to mutter some unintelligible words. All at once, raising himself to a sitting posture, he sang out, at the top of his voice,

"Starboard your helm there, George—starboard your helm; bring her around quick. The Alert can show as clean a pair of heels as any boat about the village."

In an instant the other boys were awake, and Harry continued to shout his directions, until several hearty thumps on the back caused him to change his tune.

"Let me alone!" he shouted. "We haven't cheated you. We promised to carry the provisions all over in one boat, and we've done it."

Harry was quickly dragged out of bed and placed upon his feet, and he was wide awake in an instant, but he stood in the middle of the room, as if bewildered, while the others rolled on the beds, convulsed with laughter.

At length, William Johnson, who was the first that could speak, inquired,

"I wonder what time it is."

"Wait until I light this candle, and we'll see," said George.

"No, no, don't do that," said Frank. "The coast-guards may be on the watch, and, if they see a light in the house, will be getting ready for us."

And, going to the clock, he opened it, and, feeling of the hands, said.

"It 's about ten minutes to three."

"What shall we do?" inquired Ben.

"Let us go and see what our friends of the squadron are doing," said Thomas; "and, if they are not on hand, we can slip over and land our goods."

By this time every one was dressed, and they crept carefully down stairs and out of the house.

"Hold on a minute, boys," said Frank. "I will bet there are spies around that boat-house now."

"Let 's take them prisoners," exclaimed Harry.

"That 's just what I was about to propose," said Frank; "but, in order to do it, we had better divide into two parties, so as to surround the house."

"Well," said George, "three of us will go up the road, and cross over by the bridge, and the rest of you can go down the road, and get into the willows behind the mill."

"That 's a good idea," said Frank. "We will meet at the back of the boat-house."

The boys accordingly separated, and started in different directions.

Frank and his party, which consisted of Harry and Ben, threaded their way through the garden, and across a meadow, until they arrived opposite Mr. Butler's mill. Here they crossed the road, and, after a careful reconnoissance, entered the

willows, and crawled, almost on their hands and knees, toward the boat-house. At length they arrived at the place where they were to meet their companions, but nothing was to be seen or heard of them.

"I hope they have not been taken prisoners," whispered Frank.

"I do n't think they have," said Ben, "because we should have heard something of it. They are not the ones to give up without a struggle. But I do n't see any thing of the spies."

"Neither do I," said Harry. "They must be around the other side of the boat-house."

"If they are there," said Frank, "we will soon make them show themselves."

And, as he spoke, he seized a branch above his head, and shook it violently.

"Oh, that 's no way," whispered Harry, excitedly; "you will frighten the—"

"—sh! there they are!" said Frank.

And, as he spoke, the smugglers saw a boy come cautiously around the corner of the boat-house. He gazed impatiently toward the willows, and uttered a low whistle.

Frank instantly answered it, and the boy came down the bank, and said, in a low voice,

"Come out here, Jim. I thought you would never relieve us. No signs of the smugglers yet—"

"You must be mistaken," said Frank, springing lightly from his concealment; and, before the coast-guard could recover from his surprise, he found himself a prisoner.

"Don't make any noise," said Frank. "Where's your companion? There must be two of you."

"Yes, there is another one," answered the prisoner. "Ned Wilbur is around the other side of the boat-house."

"Well, Ben," said Frank, "if you will watch this fellow, Harry and I will see what we can do for Ned."

So saying, he went carefully around one side of the boat-house, and Harry disappeared around the other. Frank reached the end of the house first, and discovered the coast-guard standing in the door-way, as motionless as a statue. He was waiting for Harry to make his appearance at the opposite end, when the sentinel suddenly uttered an ejaculation of surprise, and bounded up the bank; but, just as he reached the top, a dark form, which seemed to rise out of the ground, clasped the fleeting coast-guard in its arms, and a voice, which Frank recognized as William Johnson's, said, in a low whisper,

"You're my prisoner!"

"It's just my luck," said the crest-fallen sentinel, bitterly, as William led him down the bank. "I told Charley Sheldon that we would be sure to

be gobbled up if we were stationed here. Now, I suppose, you want me to tell all our plans."

"No, we don't," answered Harry; "we know all your plans already."

By this time the smugglers had all come in, and, holding fast to their captives, they held a consultation, in which it was decided that it would be best to reconnoiter before attempting to leave the creek. It was very dark, and not a sound broke the stillness of the night; but the smugglers were too cunning to believe that the coast was clear, for they knew that the enemy would resort to every possible means to effect their capture.

Three of the smugglers were directed to get into Mr. Butler's yawl, taking one of the prisoners with them, and drop down to the mouth of Glen's Creek, and note the position of the enemy there; and Frank and the other boys stepped into the skiff, and started up toward Ducks' Creek, to ascertain the condition of affairs, taking Ned with them. They pulled rapidly, but noiselessly, along, and had almost reached the creek, when a strong, cheery voice, directly before them, called out,

"Boat ahoy!"

"There," whispered Harry, "we 're discovered."

"No, I guess not," said Frank. "Ned," he continued, turning to the prisoner, "you must talk for us. Answer them."

"Ay, ay, sir," shouted Ned, in reply to the hail

"What boat is that?"

"Dispatch boat," answered Ned, prompted by Frank; "and we bring orders for you to pull down and join the fleet, which is now blockading the mouth of Glen's Creek."

"All right," answered the voice. "We've been waiting an hour for that order. This playing police is dull business."

And the smugglers heard the rattling of a chain, as if the anchor was being pulled up.

"Tell them to make haste," whispered Frank.

"Come, hurry up there, now," shouted Ned.

"Ay, ay," was the answer.

And, in a few moments, the Sampson, propelled by four oars, shot past them, on her way down the creek.

"That's what I call pretty well done," said Ben, as soon as the coast-guards were out of hearing.

"I don't," said Ned. "It goes against me to fool a fellow in that way; and my own friends, too."

The smugglers now continued on their way, and a few strong pulls brought them within a short distance of the mouth of Ducks' Creek; and Frank, who was at the helm, turned the boat's head toward the shore, and, as soon as her keel touched the bottom, he and Ben sprang out, leaving Harry to watch the prisoner.

They had landed upon Reynard's Island, and immediately started for the opposite side, to learn, if possible, what was going on upon the river. Every thing was as silent as midnight; and the smugglers were obliged to move very carefully, for the slightest sound—the snapping of a twig or the rustling of a leaf—could be heard at a long distance. After proceeding a quarter of a mile in this cautious manner, they reached the opposite side of the island.

"Well," said Ben, after trying in vain to peer through the darkness, "how do matters stand? I wonder if we could not have slipped by their police, and reached the island, before they knew it?"

"No, sir," said Frank, "not by a good deal. We should certainly have been captured."

"How do you know? I can't see any thing."

"Neither can I; but listen, and you will *hear* something. They are taking their positions."

The boys remained silent, and the suppressed murmur of voices, the strokes of muffled oars, and, now and then, a gentle splashing in the water, as of an anchor dropped carefully overboard, could be distinctly heard.

"I am still of the opinion," said Ben, "that we could run the blockade before they could catch us."

"And I still think that we should get caught,"

said Frank. "If we should attempt to hoist a sail, it could be heard across the river; besides, there is no breeze."

"Then, try the oars."

"They would overtake us before we had gone twenty rods. You must remember that they outnumber us, six to one, and could easily tire us out, or cut us off from the island. Wait until the breeze springs up, and then we will see what we can do."

"Listen," whispered Ben, suddenly; "some of the boats are coming down this way. They are sending a division of the fleet to guard Ducks' Creek."

And so it proved. The slow, measured strokes of oars came nearer and nearer, and, finally, the tall, raking masts of three of the swiftest-sailing boats in the squadron could be dimly seen moving down the river toward the creek. As they approached, the smugglers discovered that two boys, in a light skiff, led the way, and one of them, who proved to be Charles Sheldon, pointed out the position he wished each boat to occupy. The places assigned them were not directly opposite the mouth of the creek, but a little up the river, and about twenty feet from the shore; and this, afterward, proved to be a very favorable circumstance for the smugglers.

"Now, boys," said Charles, after he had placed

the little vessels to his satisfaction, "keep a good look-out up the river."

"I should think," said the captain of the division, "that you ought to have us anchor directly in the mouth of the creek. We shall have a good stiff breeze before long, and the Alert might slip out at any time, and, before we could hoist a sail, she would be half-way across the river."

"I don't think she will trouble you down here," said Charles. "Frank Nelson would n't be foolish enough to send her out here, for it 's a good quarter of a mile below the foot of the island; and, even if she does come out here, and succeeds in getting by you, all we will have to do will be to send a division down to the foot of the island to meet her there, and then her capture is certain. Now, remember, keep an eye open to every thing that goes on up the river. Never mind the Speedwell and Champion—let them go where they please; but, if you see the Alert, why, you know what to do."

And Charles and his attendant pulled back up the river.

"Now, Ben," said Frank, "we 've heard enough to know that we have fooled them nicely; so let 's go back."

This, however, was no easy undertaking. The way to their boat lay through bushes that could scarcely be penetrated, even in the day-time. The

coast-guards were anchored close by the shore, and the slightest noise would arouse their suspicions.

Frank led the way on his hands and knees, carefully choosing his ground, and they, at length, succeeded in reaching their boat, without disturbing the coast-guards.

A few moments' pulling brought them alongside Mr. Butler's wharf, where they found the others waiting for them.

"What news?" inquired George, as they clambered up out of the boat.

Frank explained, in a few words, the position of the squadron at the mouth of Ducks' Creek, as well as the conversation they had overheard, and also inquired of George the result of his observations.

"It was too dark to see much," he answered; "but we could plainly hear them taking their positions opposite the mouth of the creek. It will be hard work to get through them, I tell you."

"How are you going to work it, Frank?" inquired Ben.

"I'll tell you what I thought of doing," he answered. "By the way Charley Sheldon spoke, I should judge that he expects to see the Alert start from Glen's Creek; so, I think, it would be a good plan, as soon as the breeze springs up, to have the Champion and Alert drop down Ducks'

Creek, and let the former run out and start for the island. The coast-guards will not give chase, of course, but will think it is only a ruse of ours to make them believe that the Alert is going to start from the same place, and that will make them watch Glen's Creek closer than ever, and the Alert will have a chance to get a good start before they can hoist their sails, and, while they are after her, Ben and I will run out and land our goods."

"That's the way to do it," said William, approvingly. "We will fool them so completely that they will not want to hear of smugglers again for six months."

"Let's go and get some breakfast," said George. "Never go to work on an empty stomach, you know."

"Yes, come on," said Harry, taking each of the captive coast-guards by the arm; "we never feed our prisoners on half rations."

After "stowing away" a large supply of bread and milk, the smugglers, in company with their prisoners, again repaired to the boat-house. By this time it was five o'clock, and the breeze which the coast-guards had predicted began to spring up, and promised to freshen into a capital "sailing wind."

In a few moments the *real* provisions were all packed away, as closely as possible, in the Speedwell, and the load was as large as she could well

carry, there being scarcely room enough left for the action of the sails.

"I guess we are all ready now," said Frank; "so, Bill, you might as well drop down Ducks' Creek and sail out."

"All right," answered William.

And he and Thomas clambered down into the boat, with the prisoners, the sails were hoisted, and the Champion was soon hidden from sight by the tall reeds and bushes that lined the banks of the creek.

"Now, Harry," continued Frank, "Ben and I will take our boat and hide behind the point, and, in about five minutes, you may follow the Champion."

"Now, make use of your best seamanship," said Ben. "You can lead them a long chase, if you try."

"I assure you that we will do our best," said George.

The Speedwell's sails were hoisted, and Frank took his seat at the helm, while Ben placed himself so as to assist in managing the sails. Brave took his usual station in the bow, and they moved slowly down the creek.

The point of which Frank had spoken was a long, low neck of land, covered with trees, which completely concealed the mouth of Glen's Creek. In a few moments they reached this point, and the

Speedwell's bow ran high upon the sand, and the boys sprang out, and hurried over to the other side of the point, to watch the proceedings on the river, while Brave, at his master's command, remained in the boat. Concealing themselves behind a large log, they waited impatiently for the appearance of the Champion.

The vessels of the squadron, with the exception of the division stationed at the foot of Reynard's Island, were anchored in a semicircle directly before the mouth of Glen's Creek, from which it was expected that the Alert would start. Each sloop was manned by two boys, and the schooners had a crew of four. Every one stood at his post, and was ready to move at the word.

"They meant to be ready for us, didn't they?" asked Frank. "I wonder if they thought we would be foolish enough to send the Alert out of this creek, in the face of all those boats?"

"I don't know," answered Ben. "I suppose they thought— See there! there goes the Champion."

Frank looked down the river, and saw that the stanch little sloop had already run the blockade, and was standing boldly toward the island. Her appearance was sudden and wholly unexpected, and several of the coast-guards sprang to their feet, and a dozen sails were half-way up the mast in a twinkling; but, as soon as they discovered

that it was not the Alert, they quickly returned to their posts, and, in a moment, all the bustle and confusion was over.

The eye of every boy in the squadron was now directed toward Glen's Creek, expecting, every moment, to see the schooner round the point.

The Champion had accomplished, perhaps, half the distance across the river, when the Alert suddenly shot from Ducks' Creek, and, hauling around before the wind, ran in between two of the blockading fleet, so close as to almost graze them, and stood toward the foot of the island.

As soon as the coast-guards could recover from their surprise, Charles shouted,

"Up anchor—quick!"

The next moment he called out,

"Jim, take your division, and creep down the shore of the island, and be ready to catch her there, if she gets away from us."

For a few moments there was a "great hurrying" among the coast-guards. The anchors were drawn up with a jerk, the sails flew up the masts, and the little fleet bore rapidly down upon the smuggler.

As soon as Frank saw that the race had fairly begun, he exclaimed,

"Now's our time, Ben!"

They ran back to their boat, and hastily shoved from the shore, and the Speedwell, making good

her name, was soon plowing the river, in the direction of the island.

So intent were the coast-guards upon catching the Alert, that they thought of nothing else; and Frank rounded the head of the island, and landed, without being discovered.

Meanwhile, George and Harry were leading their pursuers a long chase. Under their skillful management—standing first on one tack and then on the other—they had succeeded in outmaneuvering several of the swiftest-sailing vessels in the squadron.

Two or three small sloops had succeeded in getting between the Alert and the island; but Harry, who was at the helm, did not deem them worthy a moment's notice. He was confident that his schooner, by her superior sailing qualities, would soon leave these behind also.

The smugglers began to grow jubilant over their success, and George called out,

"Where are your men-o'-war now? Throw us a line, and we'll tow you."

"Come on, you coast-guards," chimed in Harry. "You will never catch us, at this rate."

If the smugglers *had* succeeded in eluding their pursuers, it would, indeed, have been an achievement worth boasting of; but they had to deal with those who were as cunning and skillful as them-

selves. Charles was not to be beaten so easily; and, although he said nothing, the smugglers saw him smile and shake his head, as if he were certain that he could yet win the day.

"Can you discover any fast boats ahead of us, George?" inquired Harry.

George rose to his feet to take a survey of the squadron, and answered,

"No, there are only two or three little things standing across our bows, but we'll soon— We're caught, sure as shooting!" he suddenly exclaimed, changing his tone. "Bring her around before the wind—quick! There's the North Star, Sunshine, and Sampson. We might as well haul down the sails."

James Porter's division, which had been "laying to" at the foot of Glen's Island, now bore down upon the Alert, and George had just discovered them; and they were coming on in such a manner that escape was impossible.

"Yes," answered Harry, as soon as he had noted the positions of the approaching vessels, "we are caught. We began to brag too soon."

"Well, we don't lose any thing," said George. "Frank has landed the provisions long before this."

"I know it; but still I wish we could have beaten them."

"What do you think now, Harry?" asked Charles, whose boat was following close in the wake of the Alert.

"I think we are done for."

And, as Harry "luffed in the wind," George drew down the sails, and gave up the struggle.

In a moment the little fleet closed about the smuggler, and, to prevent accident, the sails were all hauled down, and the boats lay motionless on the water.

"I tell you," said Charles, "you fellows worked it pretty well."

"Yes," answered George, as if a little crest-fallen at their defeat. "We did the best we could."

"I thought we had more provisions than this," said one of the captains of the squadron, pulling his boat alongside of the Alert. "I didn't think you could get them all in here."

And he pulled up the covering, and looked under it.

"They are packed in tight, you see," said Harry, who wished to keep up the "sell," as he called it, as long as possible.

"What are in these bags?" inquired one.

"Shavings," answered George. "We thought we might want to kindle a fire for something."

"I say, George," said James Porter, standing up in his boat to get a good view of the things in

the Alert. "I wish you would feel in my basket, and get a cup that is in there, and pass it over this way. I'm thirsty I was so excited," he continued, taking off his hat and wiping the perspiration from his forehead, "that I sweat as if I had been dumped in the river. There is n't a dry rag on me."

"Which is your basket?" inquired Harry, struggling hard to suppress a laugh.

"It 's a brown basket, with a white cover," answered James.

George and Harry were too full of laughter to trust themselves to speak; but Charles exclaimed, as he drew aside the covering,

"There 's no brown basket here."

"There ought to be," said one of the coast-guards; "I brought my things in a brown basket."

"So did I," exclaimed another.

"There 's a cheat somewhere," said James.

"You have n't done as you agreed," said Charles. "You promised to carry all the things in one boat."

"Yes, that 's what you agreed to do," shouted several.

"And we 've kept our promise," said Harry.

"Then, where 's *my* basket?" inquired one of the boys, who had failed to discover it among the things in the Alert.

"I 'll bet the Champion carried some of the provisions over," said another, "for there are not half of them here."

"No, the Champion did n't have a thing in her," said a third. "She passed so close to my boat, that I could have jumped into her, and I took particular pains to see that she was empty."

"Well, here are the things that I brought, at any rate," said Charles, who had just caught sight of the bag which contained, as he supposed, his lemons. "My goodness!" he continued, as he lifted them out of the boat, "how heavy they are!"

And he began to untie the bag, and soon disclosed to the view of the coast-guards, not the lemons, but almost half a peck of smooth, round stones.

George and Harry, who could contain themselves no longer, rolled on the bottom of the boat, convulsed with laughter; and several ready hands tore off the coverings of the baskets and pails, and they were found to be empty.

A more astonished set of boys one never saw; and, as soon as they could speak, they burst out with a volley of ejaculations that will hardly bear repetition.

"We 've been chasing the wrong boat," said one.

"Yes," answered another, "and I knew it would

be so. That Frank Nelson is too much of a Yankee for us."

"The Speedwell—the Speedwell!" shouted another; "keep a good look-out for her."

"Oh, you 're too late," said Harry, with a laugh, "the provisions were landed long ago."

"I do n't believe it. I did n't see any thing of her."

"Of course you did n't," said Charles; "you were too intent on catching the Alert. Boys," he continued, "we 're fairly beaten. Let 's start for the island."

The coast-guards silently obeyed, and the smugglers refrained from making any remarks, for they saw that the squadron's crew took their defeat sorely to heart.

In a few moments the little fleet rounded the foot of the island, and the boys discovered the Champion and Speedwell, lying with their bows high upon the sand, and their crews were busy carrying the provisions under the shade of a large oak, that stood near the water's edge.

As soon as the last vessel came in sight, the smugglers on shore greeted them with three hearty cheers, which George and Harry answered with a will, but the coast-guards remained silent.

In a few moments they had all landed, and the smugglers joined their companions; and Charles took off his hat, and said to the coast-guards,

"Boys, I want to have just one word with you. We have been beaten," he continued, as they gathered silently about him, "completely outwitted; but it was fairly done. We took all the advantage of the smugglers that we could, but they have beaten us at our own game. I feel as cheap as any of you do, but it can't be helped now; and there's no use of having unpleasant feelings about it, for that would spoil a good day's sport. If we didn't catch them, we did our best, and we had a good, exciting race—one that I wouldn't have missed for a good deal. Now, boys, show that you appreciate the good trick that has been played on us, by giving the smugglers three hearty cheers."

This little speech—showing Charles to be a boy of good feeling—had the effect of convincing the coast-guards that to manifest any ill-will at their defeat would be both unkind and selfish, and the cheer that rose from forty strong lungs was almost deafening. The smugglers, who had heard what Charles had said, cheered lustily, in turn, for the coast-guards, and instantly every unkind feeling vanished. The coast-guards readily entered into conversation with the smugglers, and the latter explained the trick of which they had made use, as well as the manner in which the capture of the prisoners was affected, and the adventure with the police-boat; and, although the coast-guards were

provoked at themselves for "not having more sense," as they termed it, they could not refrain from joining in a hearty laugh.

By this time the refreshments had all been carried under the tree of which we have spoken, where there was a smooth grass-plat, which made a nice place to set the table.

The boys had spent some time relating various incidents that had occurred during the chase, when Ben suddenly inquired,

"Well, boys, what 's to be the order of the day? You know that we came over here to enjoy ourselves, and we had better be about it."

"I think," said Charles, "that it would be a good plan to appoint a committee to arrange those eatables. We came away without our breakfast, and I, for one, feel hungry."

"There 's where we had the advantage of you," said Thomas. "While you were hurrying around, and taking your positions, we were eating our breakfast. You see, we took matters easy."

"And beat us, after all," said one of the coast-guards; "it 's too bad. But let 's have that committee appointed."

A dozen boys were speedily chosen to set the table, and the others, catching up all the empty pails and baskets they could find, scattered over the island in search of strawberries.

In about an hour they met again under the tree,

and found the refreshments all ready for them, and they fell to work in earnest. So full were they of their sport, that it took them two hours to eat their dinner, as they had said they had come to enjoy themselves, and felt in duty bound to eat all their baskets contained.

After dinner, one of the smugglers proposed to go squirrel-hunting; but many of the coast-guards had passed the preceding night without any sleep, and, to use their own expression, they "did n't feel like it;" so this project was abandoned, and the boys lay on the grass, under the tree, telling stories, until almost three o'clock, and then began to get ready to start for home.

CHAPTER X.

A Queer Cousin.

AS every one knows, it would be almost an impossibility for sixteen sail-boats to go any where in company without trying their speed, especially if they were sailed by boys. When our heroes stepped into their vessels, each skipper made up his mind that his boat must be the first one to touch the opposite shore. Not a word was said about a race, but every one knew that one would be sure to come off. Every thing was done in a hurry, and the little vessels were all afloat in a moment. They were on the leeward side of the island—that is, the side from the wind—and they would be obliged to get around to the opposite side before they could use their sails.

The coast-guards shoved their boats out into the current, and allowed themselves to float down toward the foot of the island, thinking that course

easier than pulling, against the current, up to the head of the island.

Frank noticed this movement, and said, in a low voice, to the smugglers,

"Don't follow them, boys. They will find themselves becalmed in less than a quarter of an hour. The breeze is dying away. If you want to beat them, hoist your sails, and get out your oars, and row up to the head of the island; we can reach it before they reach the foot, and, besides, the current will carry them further down the river than they want to go."

The smugglers did as Frank had directed; and, as they moved from the shore, and turned up the river, one of the coast-guards called out,

"Where are you fellows going?"

"Home," answered Ben.

"You are taking the longest and hardest way."

"The longest way around is the nearest way home, you know," answered William.

"I don't believe it is, in this instance," said James Porter. "Let's see who will be at the long dock first."

"All right," answered the smugglers.

And they disappeared behind a high-wooded promontory of the island.

It was hard work, pulling against a current that ran four miles an hour, but they were accustomed

to it, and the thought of again beating the coast-guards gave strength to their arms.

In a few moments a sudden filling of the sails announced that they had caught the breeze. The oars were drawn in, and every sheet hauled taut, and, when they rounded the head of the island, not one of the squadron was in sight.

"I expected," said Harry, speaking in a loud voice, so that the others could hear, "that they would feel the wind long before this."

"Even if they had," answered Frank, "we could have beaten them easily enough. You see, when they come around the foot of the island, they will be some distance below the long dock, and the current will carry them still further down, while we are above it, and can sail right down to it. Here they come!"

The boys looked down the river, and saw the men-o'-war rapidly following each other around the foot of the island.

"I guess they have discovered their mistake before this time," said William. "Now," he continued, as he drew his mainsail down a little closer "the Champion is going to be the first to sail into the creek."

"That's the game, is it?" said Frank. "Ben, perch yourself up on the windward side, and we'll see which is the best boat."

Ben did as he was desired, and the little vessels

increased their speed, and bounded over the gentle swells as if some of their crews' spirit had been infused into them. They had started nearly even—the Alert and Champion being a little in advance of the Speedwell—and the boys knew that the race was to be a fair trial of the speed of their boats. The Alert and Speedwell had never been "matched" before, and the boys were anxious to learn their comparative speed. The former was the "champion" boat of the village, and Harry and George were confident that Frank's "tub," as they jokingly called it, would soon be distanced. Frank thought so, too; but the reputation of owning the swiftest boat in the village was well worth trying for, and he determined to do his best.

Since his race with the Champion, he had made larger sails for his boat, and added a flying-jib and a gaff-topsail, and he found that her speed was almost doubled.

The Champion soon fell behind, and the two rival boats were left to finish the race, which, for a long time, seemed undecided. But, at length, the Speedwell, with her strong mast groaning and creaking under the weight of the heavy canvas, began to gain steadily, and soon passed the Alert. Ten minutes' run brought them across the river; and when Frank, proud of the victory he had gained, rounded the long dock, the Alert was full four rods behind.

The breeze was rapidly dying away, and not one of the coast-guards had yet reached the shore. Some of them had been carried almost a mile below the creek, and lay with the sails idly flapping against the masts.

Frank and Ben sailed slowly along up the creek, and, when they arrived at the end of the dock, the Speedwell was "made fast," and the boys started to get their mail.

As they entered the post-office, Frank stepped up to the "pigeon-hole," and the postmaster handed him two letters; one was addressed to his mother, and the other bore his own name, written in a full, round, school-boy's hand.

"Ben," he exclaimed, as he broke the seal, "I've got a letter from Archie. I wrote to him a month ago; I should think it was about time to get an answer."

"See if he says any thing about getting a letter from me," said Ben. "I haven't heard from him in a long time."

Before proceeding further, it may not be improper to say a word about Archie Winters. He was, as we have already said, Frank's cousin, and lived in the city of Portland. He was just Frank's age, and, like him, was kind and generous; but he was not the boy for books. When in school, he was an obedient and industrious pupil, and learned very readily; but, when four o'clock came, he was

the first to lay aside his books. He was very fond of rural sports, and, for a city boy, was a very expert hunter; he even considered himself able to compete with Frank. He was also passionately fond of pets, and, if he could have had his own way, he would have possessed every cat and dog in the city. His father was a wealthy ship-builder, and Archie was an only child. But he was not, as is generally the case, spoiled by indulgence; on the contrary, his parents always required his prompt and cheerful obedience, and, when out of their sight, Archie was very careful to do nothing of which he thought his parents would not approve. Every vacation he paid a visit to his cousin, and sometimes staid until late in the winter, to engage in his favorite sport. He was well known to the village boys, among whom his easy and obliging manners had won many a steadfast friend.

But let us now return to the letter, which ran as follows:

PORTLAND, *June* 28, 18—.

DEAR COUSIN: Your letter of the 16th of last month was duly received, and, I suppose, you think it is about time for me to answer it. They say that a person who is good at making excuses is good for nothing else; but, I suppose, you will expect some apology for my seeming neglect. You perhaps remember hearing your mother speak of James Sherman, a cousin whom we had never seen. About two weeks since, father received a letter from his mother, stating that she and James would be at our house in about three days

Well, they came agreeably to notice, and I have had the pleasure of entertaining our cousin ever since. I have had to pilot him around, and show him all the sights, and I have had time for nothing else.

I will not tell you what sort of a fellow he is; I will leave you to judge of his general character, etc. He and his mother are now on their way to Lawrence, and they expect to be at your house about the 6th (July). They intend to remain about two weeks. When I saw them getting into the train, and knew that in a few days they would be with you, I wanted very much to accompany them. But mother says *one* noisy boy in the house is sufficient. (I wonder whether she means you or James!) But as soon as they have ended their visit, if nothing happens, you may expect to see our family landing from the Julia Burton, some fine morning. I have been pent up in the city now almost six months, and I am impatient to get into the country again—especially among the trout-streams about your quiet little village.

I have often thought of the sport we had the day we went up to Dungeon Brook. I know it rained hard, but the string of trout we caught beat any thing of the kind I ever happened to see.

But I've got some good news for you. Father has decided to spend part of the winter at Uncle Joe's, and he promises to take you and me with him; so you can begin to pack up your duds as soon as you wish.

That trout-pole you made for me last winter met with a serious accident a few days since. One of my schoolmates invited me to go up the river with him, and try a perch-bed he had accidentally discovered. I had sent off my heavy pole to the painters, so I was obliged to take my trout-pole. I was afraid that I should break it, but it behaved beautifully for about two hours, during which time I drew in sixty fine perch and rock-bass—some of the former weighing between one and two pounds—and I began to think that the pole was too tough to break. But I was very soon convinced of my mistake, for,

as bad luck would have it, I hooked on to a black-bass. I thought I handled him very carefully, but, before we could land him, he broke my pole in three pieces; but the line held, and he was soon floundering in the boat. He was a fine fellow—a regular "sockdologer"—weighing six pounds and a half. But I heartily wished him safe in the bottom of the river. I have laid the pole away, and intend to bring it to you for repairs.

But it is ten o'clock, and father suggests that, if I wish to get to the post-office before the mail closes, I had "better make tracks." So I must stop. Love to all.

Yours affectionately, A. WINTERS.

P. S.—Please tell Ben and Harry that I will answer their letters immediately. A. W.

By this time the rest of the smugglers had arrived, and, as soon as Frank had run his eye over the letter, and began to fold it up, George inquired,

"Well, what does he say? Did he receive Harry's letter?"

"Yes, and also one from Ben. He says he will answer them at once."

After a few moments' conversation, the boys separated, and started for home, expressing themselves highly delighted at Frank's way of spending the Fourth.

The day on which Mrs. Sherman and her son were expected at length arrived. As a fine breeze was blowing, Frank and his sister—accompanied,

of course, by Brave—stepped into the Speedwell, and started to enjoy a sail on the river.

It was now the summer vacation, and the boys were determined to have plenty of recreation after their long siege of study; and, when Frank reached the mouth of the creek, he found the river dotted with white sails as far as he could see. Several of the boats had started on fishing excursions, but the majority of them were sailing idly about, as if nothing particular had been determined on.

Frank turned the Speedwell's head down the river, and soon joined the little fleet. He had hoisted every stitch of canvas his boat could carry, and she flew along, passing several of the swiftest vessels, and finally encountered the Alert. The race was short, for the Speedwell easily passed her, and George and Harry were compelled to acknowledge that, to use their own expression, "the Alert was nowhere."

In about two hours the Julia Burton was seen rounding the point, and a loud, clear whistle warned the villagers of her approach. Frank turned the Speedwell toward home, and arrived at the wharf about ten minutes after the steamer had landed.

As they sailed along up the creek, Julia suddenly exclaimed,

"I wonder who those people are!"

Frank turned, and saw a lady just getting into a carriage, and a boy, apparently about his own age, stood by, giving orders, in a loud voice, to the driver, about their baggage. Both were dressed in the hight of fashion, and Frank knew, from the description his aunt had given his mother, that they were the expected visitors.

As soon as the boy had satisfied himself that their baggage was safe, he continued, in a voice loud enough to be heard by Frank and his sister,

"Now, driver, you're sure you know where Mrs. Nelson lives?"

"Yes, sir," answered the man, respectfully.

"Well, then, old beeswax, hurry up. Show us how fast your cobs can travel."

So saying, he sprang into the carriage, and the driver closed the door after him, mounted to his seat, and drove off.

"Why," said Julia, in surprise, "I guess that's Aunt Harriet—don't you?"

"Yes," answered her brother, "I know it is."

"I am afraid I shall not like James," continued Julia; "he talks too loud."

Frank did not answer, for he was of the same opinion. He had inferred from Archie's letter that James would prove any thing but an agreeable companion.

The brisk wind that was blowing carried them

rapidly along, and, in a few moments, they came to a place where the road ran along close to the creek. The distance to Mrs. Nelson's, by the road, was greater, by a quarter of a mile, than by the creek, and, consequently, they had gained considerably on the carriage. Soon they heard the rattling of wheels behind them, and the hack came suddenly around a turn in the road.

James was leaning half-way out of the window, his cap pushed on one side of his head, and, not knowing Frank, he accosted him, as he came up, with his favorite expression.

"Hallo, old beeswax! Saw-logs must have been cheap when you had that boat built. You've got timber enough there to finish off a good-sized barn."

Frank, of course, made no reply; and, in a moment more, the hack was out of sight.

They soon reached the wharf, in front of the house, and Frank helped Julia out, and, after making his boat fast, started toward the house, and entered the room where their visitors were seated.

His aunt's greeting was cold and distant, and she acted as if her every motion had been thoroughly studied. James's acknowledgment was scarcely more than agreeable. To Frank's inquiry, "How do you do, sir?" he replied,

"Oh, I'm bully, thank you, old beeswax.

not you the cod I twigged* navigating that scow up the creek?"

Frank acknowledged himself to be the person, and James continued,

"I suppose she's the champion yacht, isn't she?"

"Yes," answered Frank, "she is. There's no boat about the village that can beat her."

"Ah, possibly; but, after all, you had better tell that to the marines. I've seen too much of the world to have a country chap stuff me, now I tell you, old beeswax."

We will not particularize upon James's visit. It will suffice to relate one or two incidents that will illustrate his character.

A day or two after his arrival, he discovered the schooner standing on Frank's bureau, and he could not be contented until he should see "how she carried herself in the water," and Frank, reluctantly, carried it down to the creek and set it afloat.

For a few moments James seemed to have forgotten his evil propensities, and they amused themselves by sailing the schooner from one side of the creek to the other. But he very soon grew tired of this "lame, unexciting sport," as he called it, and, gathering up an armful of stones, he began

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* Saw.

to throw them into the water near the boat, shouting,

"Storm on the Atlantic! See her rock!"

"Please don't, James," urged Frank; "I'm afraid you will hit the schooner."

"No fear of that," answered James, confidently, still continuing to throw the stones; "I can come within a hair's-breadth of her, and not touch her. Now, see."

And, before Frank could speak, away flew a large stone, with great force, and, crashing through the mainsail of the little vessel, broke both masts and the bowsprit short off.

"There," exclaimed Frank, "I was afraid you would do that."

James did not appear to be in the least sorry for it, but he skipped up the bank, shouting, in an insulting tone,

"There's your boat, old beeswax. When do you expect her in port?"

Frank did not answer, but drew what remained of the schooner to the shore, and, taking it under his arm, started for his shop, saying,

"Now, that's a nice cousin for a fellow to have. I'll do my best to treat him respectfully while he stays, but I shall not be sorry when the time comes to bid him good-by."

And that time was not far distant. James had often complained to his mother that Frank was a

"low-minded, mean fellow," and urged an immediate departure. His mother always yielded to his requests, or rather *demands*, no matter how unreasonable they might be; and they had scarcely made a visit of a week, when they announced their intention of leaving Lawrence by the "next boat."

On the day previous to their departure, Mrs. Nelson had occasion to send Frank to the village for some groceries, and, as a favorable wind was blowing, he decided to go in his boat. But, before starting, he managed to slip away from James long enough to write a few lines to Archie, urging him to come immediately.

Frank intended to start off without James's knowledge; but the uneasy fellow was always on the look-out, and, seeing his cousin going rapidly down the walk, with a basket on each arm, and his dog—which, like his master, had not much affection for James—he shouted,

"Hallo, old beeswax, where are you bound for?"

"For the village," answered Frank.

"Are you going to take the tow-path?"

"The tow-path! I don't know what you mean."

"Are you going to ride shanks' horses?"

"I don't understand that, either."

"Oh, you are a bass-wood man, indeed," said

James, with a taunting laugh. "Are you going to *walk?* Do you think you can comprehend me now?"

"Yes," answered Frank, "I can understand you when you talk English. No, I am not going to walk."

"Then I 'll go with you, if you will leave that dog at home."

"I don't see what objections you can have to his company. He always goes with me."

"I suppose you think more of him than you do of your relations; but I 'm going with you, at any rate."

And he quickened his pace to overtake Frank.

While his cousin was hoisting the sails, James deliberately seated himself in the stern of the boat, and took hold of the tiller.

"Do you understand managing a sail-boat?" inquired Frank, as he stood ready to cast off the painter.

"If any one else had asked me that question," answered James, with an air of injured dignity, "I should have considered it an insult. Of course I *do*."

"All right, then," said Frank, as he pushed the boat from the wharf. "Go ahead. We shall be obliged to tack a good many times, going down, but we can sail back like a book, and—"

"Oh, you teach your grandmother, will you?"

interrupted James. "I've sailed more boats than you ever saw."

Frank, at first, did not doubt the truth of this assertion, for James lived in a seaport town, and had had ample opportunity to learn how to manage a yacht; but they had not made twenty feet from the wharf, when he made up his mind that his cousin had never before attempted to act as skipper.

Instead of keeping as close as possible to the wind, as he should have done, he turned the boat's head first one way and then another, and, of course, made no headway at all.

"I never saw such a tub as this," said James, at length; "I can't make her mind her helm."

Just at this moment a strong gust of wind filled the sails, and, as James was not seaman enough to "luff" or "let go the sheet," the Speedwell came very near capsizing. As she righted, the wind again filled the sails, and the boat was driven with great speed toward the shore. Frank had barely time to pull up the center-board before her bows ran high upon the bank, and the sheet was roughly jerked from James's hand, and flapped loudly against the mast.

"There," said Frank, turning to his cousin, who sat, pale with terror, "I guess it's a long time since you attempted to sail a boat; you seem to have forgotten how. I tell you," he continued,

as he noticed James's trepidation, "if I had n't pulled up that center-board just as I did, we should have been obliged to swim for it."

"I can't swim," said James, in a weak voice.

"Then you would have been in a fix," said Frank. "Now, let me see if I can have any better luck."

James very willingly seated himself on one of the middle thwarts, and Frank pushed the boat from the shore, and took hold of the tiller, and, under his skillful management, the Speedwell flew through the water like a duck.

James soon got over his fright, and his uneasy nature would not allow him to remain long inactive, and, as he could find nothing else to do, he commenced to rock the boat from one side to the other, and, as she was "heeling" considerably, under the weight of her heavy canvas, the water began to pour in over her side. Although the speed of the boat was greatly diminished, Frank, for some time, made no complaint, hoping that his cousin would soon grow tired of the sport. But James did not seem inclined to cease, and Frank, at length, began to remonstrate.

He reminded James that it would not require much to capsize the boat, and, as the creek was very deep, and as he (James) had said he could not swim, he might be a "gone sucker."

This, at first, had the effect of making James

more careful, but he soon commenced again as bad as ever.

Brave was seated in his usual place, and directly behind James. He seemed to dislike the rocking of the boat as much as his master, but he bore it very patiently for awhile, thinking, no doubt, that the best way to deal with James was to "let him severely alone." But the rocking increased, and Brave began to slide from one side of the boat to the other. This was enough to upset his patience; and, encouraged, perhaps, by some sly glances from Frank, he sprang up, and, placing a paw on each shoulder of his tormentor, barked fiercely, close to his ear.

James screamed loudly; and Brave, evidently thinking he had punished him enough, returned to his seat.

"Let me ashore," shouted James; "I sha n't stay in here any longer."

Frank gladly complied, and, the moment the Speedwell's bows touched the bank, James sprang out.

"I would n't risk my life in that tub again for any money," he shouted; "you may bet on that, old beeswax."

Frank made no reply, but pushed the boat from the shore again as soon as possible.

James now felt safe; and, gathering up a hand

ful of stones, determined to wreak his vengeance on Brave. The sensible Newfoundlander, at first, paid no attention to this cowardly assault; but the stones whizzed by in unpleasant proximity, now and then striking the sail or the side of the boat, and he began to manifest his displeasure, by showing his teeth and growling savagely.

Frank stood it as long as possible, knowing that the best plan was to remain silent; but James continued to follow the boat, and the stones struck all around the object of his vengeance.

"I wish you would n't do that," said Frank, at length.

"You do, eh?" said James. "How are you going to hinder it? But perhaps you would rather have me throw at you."

And, picking up a large stone, he hurled it at his cousin with great force. It fell into the creek, close to the boat, and splashed the water all over Frank.

This seemed to enrage Brave more than ever, and he sprang into the water, and swam toward the shore, and no amount of scolding on Frank's part could induce him to return. James, fearing that he was about to be punished in a way he had not thought of, turned and took to his heels.

At this moment a loud shout was heard, and several boys sprang over the fence into the road,

and James was speedily overtaken and surrounded. They were a ragged, hard-looking set of fellows, and Frank knew that they were the Hillers; besides, he recognized the foremost of them as Lee Powell. They had their fishing-rods on their shoulders, and each boy carried in his hand a long string of trout.

"Look 'e here, you spindle-shanked dandy," said Lee, striding up and laying hold of James's collar with no friendly hand, "does yer know who yer was a heavin' rocks at? Shall we punch him for yer?" he added, turning to Frank.

"No," answered Frank; "let him go; he 's my cousin."

Lee accordingly released him, and James said, in a scarcely audible voice,

"I was only in fun."

"Oh, only playin', was yer?" said Lee; "that alters the case 'tirely—don't it, Pete?"

The boy appealed to nodded his assent, and Lee continued,

"We thought yer was in blood arnest. If yer *had* been, we wouldn't a left a grease-spot of yer—would we, Pete?"

"Mighty cl'ar of us," answered Pete.

As soon as James found himself at liberty, he started toward home at full speed, hardly daring to look behind him. Brave had by this time

gained the shore, and was about to start in pursuit, but a few sharp words from Frank restrained him.

"Whar are yer goin'?" inquired Lee, walking carelessly down the bank.

"I'm going to the village," answered Frank.

"Will yer give a feller a ride?"

"Certainly. Jump in."

The Hillers accordingly clambered into the boat, and, in a few moments, they reached the wharf, at the back of the post-office.

Lee and his companions immediately sprang out, and walked off, without saying a word; and Frank, after fastening his boat to the wharf, began to pull down the sails, when he discovered that the Hillers had left two large strings of trout behind them.

Hastily catching them up, he ran around the corner of the post-office, and saw Lee and his followers, some distance up the road.

"Hallo!" he shouted, at the top of his lungs; "Lee Powell!"

But they paid no attention to him.

"I know they heard me," said Frank.

And he shouted again, but with no better success.

At length, one of the village boys, who was coming across the fields, with a basket of strawberries

on his arm, shouted to the Hillers, and, when he had gained their attention, pointed toward Frank.

"See here!" Frank shouted, as he held up the fish; "you have forgotten these."

"No, I guess not," shouted Lee, in reply. "We Hillers don't forget favors as easy as all that comes to. Ye're welcome to 'em."

And he and his companions walked rapidly off.

CHAPTER XI.

Trout-Fishing.

A FEW days after the events related in the preceding chapter transpired, Frank, with one or two companions, was standing in the post-office, waiting for the opening of the mail. The steamer had just landed, and the passengers which she had brought were slowly walking toward the hotel, where they intended to take dinner. At length, a village hack came rapidly down the road leading from the wharf, and, when it came opposite the post-office, a head was suddenly thrust out at the window, the driver reined in his horses, the door flew open, and Archie Winters sprang out.

We shall not attempt to describe the meeting of the cousins, nor the joy that prevailed among the village boys at the arrival of their city friend.

Archie had not written that it was his intention to come so soon, and his sudden appearance among them took them completely by surprise.

After a few moments' conversation, Frank and Archie got into the carriage, and, in a short time, were set down at the door of Mrs. Nelson's house.

Frank's mother and sister expressed much joy at Archie's arrival, and, after the excitement of meeting was over, they inquired after his parents.

"When are they coming?" asked Frank.

"They intended to come in the fall," answered Archie, "but father has more business on his hands than he expected, and they may not be here before the holidays; but I could n't wait."

"I 'm glad you did n't," said Frank. "You are not going home before spring, are you?"

"No," said Archie, "I 'm going to stay as long as you will keep me."

Frank was overjoyed at this, and, if he had not been in the house, he would have given, as he said, "a yell that would have done credit to an Indian."

But, before going further, we must say a word about Archie's companions—we mean his dogs. One of them, that answered to the name of Sport, was as fine a fox-hound as one would wish to see. He was a large, tan-colored animal, very fleet and courageous, and was well acquainted with all the tricks of his favorite game, and the boys often boasted that "Sport had never lost a fox in his life." The black fox, which had held possession of Reynard's Island so long, was captured by Frank and his cousin, with the assistance of

Sport, after a chase of three hours. Lightfoot—for that was the name of the other—was an English grayhound. He stood full three feet high at the shoulders, and his speed was tremendous. He was young, however, and knew nothing about hunting; but he had been taught to "fetch and carry," and, as he learned very readily, the boys expected plenty of sport in training him.

After supper, Archie's trunk was carried into the "study," and the boys busied themselves in taking out its contents. The clothing was all packed away in the bureau; and then came Archie's "sporting cabinet," as he called it—a fine double-barreled shot-gun, which was hung upon the frame at the foot of the bed; a quantity of ammunition, a small hatchet, powder-flasks, shot bags, and a number of other things, which were stowed away in safe places.

At length Archie drew out two fish-poles, neatly stowed away in strong bags, and one of them proved to be the one about which Archie had written. This was placed away in one corner, and Frank promised to mend it immediately.

"See here," said Archie, as he drew out two queer-looking implements; "I have been acting on the suggestion of Uncle Joe Lewis."

"What are they?" inquired Frank.

One of them was a thin rod of steel, about three feet in length, very pointed and sharp at the end

the other looked very much like a fish-spear, only the "tines" were smaller and sharper.

"They are spears," said Archie, in answer to Frank's question.

"So I see; but what use can you put them to?"

"This," said Archie, taking up the rod of steel, "is a mink-spear. Last winter we lost a good many minks, when, if we had had an instrument like this, we could have secured them easily enough. You know that sometimes you get a mink into a place where you can see him, but, if you go to work to chop a hole large enough to get a stick in to kill him, he will jump out before you know what you are about. You will remember a little incident of this kind that happened last winter—that day we had such good luck. We were following a mink up the creek on the ice, when Brave suddenly stopped before a hollow stub, and stuck his nose into a hole, and acted as if there was a mink in there; and, you know, we didn't believe there was, but we thought we could stop and see. So we cut a hole in the stub, and, sure enough, there was a mink, and, as good luck would have it, we had cut the hole close to the place where he was, and we thought we had him sure; and, while Harry Butler went to cut a stick to kill him with, I chopped the hole a little larger, so that we could see him plainer, when, all of a

sudden, out popped the mink, and, before we could say 'scat,' it was under the ice."

"Yes," said Frank, "I remember it very well; and, I guess, there were some mad boys around that place, somewhere."

"Yes," said Archie, "I was provoked because it was all my fault that we lost him. If we had had this spear, we could have killed him easy enough. We would n't be obliged to cut a hole larger than an inch square, and no mink I ever saw could get through that. And this," he continued, taking up the other instrument, "is a muskrat-spear. The way to proceed is this: Go to a muskrat's house, and, with an ax, cut a chunk out of the top, directly over where they sleep."

"And, by the time you get that done," said Frank, with a laugh, "the muskrats will be out of your way."

"I know that; they will undoubtedly start off the first blow you strike, and swim to some breathing-hole; but in a quarter of an hour they will be sure to return. While they are gone, you will have plenty of time to cut the chunk, and, after taking it out, place it carefully back, in such a manner that it can be removed instantly; then, if there are any other houses near, serve them in the same way. Then, in half an hour or so, take your spear and go to the houses, making as little noise as possible, and let your companion lift out the

chunk suddenly, and you be ready to strike Father says he has seen Uncle Joe Lewis catch half a dozen in one house, in this way, very frequently. He always spears the one nearest the passage that leads from the house down into the water, and this will prevent the others from escaping."

"I don't much like the idea," said Frank.

"Neither do I," said Archie. "It will do well enough for those who make their living by hunting; but, if I want to hunt muskrats, I would rather wait until the ice breaks up, in spring; I can then shoot them quite fast enough to suit me, and the sport is more exciting."

One morning, about a week after Archie's arrival, they arose, as usual, very early, and, while they were dressing, Frank drew aside the curtain, and looked out.

"I say, Archie," he exclaimed, "you've got your wish; it's a first-rate morning to go trout-fishing."

Archie had been waiting impatiently for a cloudy day; he was very fond of trout-fishing, and he readily agreed to his cousin's proposal to "take a trip to Dungeon Brook," and they commenced pulling on their "hunting and fishing rig," as they called it, which consisted of a pair of stout pantaloons that would resist water and dirt to the last

extremity, heavy boots reaching above their knees, and a blue flannel shirt.

While Archie was getting their fishing-tackle ready, Frank busied himself in placing on the table in the kitchen such eatables as he could lay his hands on, for he and his cousin were the only ones up.

Their breakfast was eaten in a hurry; and, after drawing on their India-rubber coats—for Frank said it would rain before they returned—they slung on their fish-baskets, and took their trout-poles in their hands, and started out.

Dungeon Brook lay about five miles distant, through the woods. It was a long tramp, over fallen logs and through thick bushes; but it was famous for its large trout, and the boys knew they would be well repaid for their trouble.

In about two hours they arrived at their destination; and, after partaking of a lunch, which Frank had brought, they rigged their "flies," and Archie went up the brook a little distance, to try a place known among the boys as the "old trout-hole," while Frank dropped his hook down close to a large log that lay across the stream, near the place where he was standing. The bait sank slowly toward the bottom, when, suddenly, there was a tremendous jerk, and the line whizzed through the water with a force that bent the tough, elastic pole

like a "reed shaken with the wind." Frank was a skillful fisherman, and, after a few moments' maneuvering, a trout weighing between three and four pounds lay floundering on the bank.

Archie soon came up, having been a little more successful, as two good-sized fish were struggling in his basket.

They walked slowly down the brook, stopping now and then to try some favorite spot, and, about three o'clock in the afternoon, they reached the place where the brook emptied into Glen's Creek, and were about two miles from home. They had been remarkably successful; their baskets were filled, and they had several "sockdologers" strung on a branch, which they carried in their hands.

After dropping their hooks for a few moments among the perch, at the mouth of the brook, they unjointed their poles, and started toward home, well satisfied with their day's work.

The next day, as Frank and Archie were on their way to the village, on foot—the wind being contrary, they could not sail—they met George and Harry, who had started to pay them a visit.

"Hallo, boys!" exclaimed the former, as soon as they came within speaking distance, "we 've got news for you."

"And some that you will not like to hear, Frank," said Harry, with a laugh.

"What is it?" inquired Archie.

"Why, you know, Charley Morgan, some time since, sent to New York for a couple of sail-boats, a sloop and schooner. They arrived yesterday, and he thinks they are something great, and says the Speedwell is nowhere."

"Yes," chimed in Harry, "he said, when those boats came, he would show us 'country chaps' some sailing that would make us open our eyes; but, come to find out, they are perfect tubs. I saw the sloop coming up the creek, and she made poor headway. The Alert can beat her all hollow, with only the foresail hoisted."

During the conversation the boys had been walking toward the village, and, in a few moments, they reached the dock behind the post-office, where the two new boats lay. One of them was a short, "dumpy," sloop-rigged boat, with no deck or center-board, and the other was a beautifully-modeled schooner.

"What do you think of them?" inquired Harry, after they had regarded them several moments.

"Well," answered Archie, "I have seen a good many boats like these in New York, but I don't think they will do much here. That schooner may show some fine sailing qualities, but that sloop will prove to be the slowest boat about the village; she is altogether too short. Take it where the waves are long and regular, and she will do well enough."

but here in the river, where the waves are all chopped up, she can't accomplish much."

"That's your private opinion, expressed here in this public manner, is it?" said a sneering voice. "You have made a fine show of your ignorance."

The boys turned, and saw Charles Morgan and several of the Rangers standing close by.

"If I didn't know more about yachts than that," continued Charles, "I'd go home and soak my head."

This remark was greeted by the Rangers with a loud laugh; and Archie, who, like Frank, was a very peaceable fellow, said,

"Every one to his own way of thinking, you know."

"Certainly," answered Charles; "but, if I was as much of a blockhead as you are, I'd be careful to keep my thoughts to myself."

Archie did not answer, for he knew it would only add fuel to the fire; for Charles's actions indicated that he was bent on getting up a quarrel. He had determined to make another attempt to "settle accounts" between himself and Frank.

"I'll bet you fifty dollars," said Charles, "that there are not half a dozen boats about the village that can beat that sloop."

"I'm not in the habit of betting," answered Archie; "but, if you will find a boat about the village that *can't* beat her, I'll eat your sloop."

"You are green, indeed," said Charles. "Now, what do you suppose that sloop cost me?"

"Well," answered Archie, thrusting his hands deep into his pockets, "I think ten dollars would foot the bill."

Archie said this in so comical a manner that Frank and the others could not refrain from laughing outright.

Charles was angry in an instant, and, quick as thought, he sprang forward and seized Archie. But he soon discovered that he had undertaken more than he could accomplish; for his antagonist, though considerably smaller than himself, was possessed of enormous strength, and was as active as a cat, and he glided like an eel from Charles's grasp, and, seizing him by both wrists, held him fast. After a few desperate, but ineffectual, attempts to free himself, Charles shouted to the Rangers, who had been bustling about in a state of considerable excitement, but very prudently keeping in the background,

"Help, help, you cowards!"

But nothing could induce them to attempt the rescue.

At this moment a boat, which had entered the creek unnoticed by the boys, drew up to the dock, and a strong, cheery voice, called out,

"Hang on to him, little fellow—hang on to him. We've got a few little matters to settle up."

And Lee Powell came running toward them, with half a dozen of his ragged followers close at his heels.

"Oh, let me go," cried Charles, turning very pale, and writhing and twisting in the strong grasp that held him; "I'll be civil to you after this, only don't let them get hold of me; they will half kill me."

Archie accordingly released his captive, but the Hillers were so close to him that Charles dare not run, and he remained close to Frank for protection, while the rest of the Rangers beat a precipitate retreat.

"Here, Pete, hold my coat," said Lee, tossing his tattered garment to one of his companions; "I'll show this Cap'n Regulator that some folks are as good as others."

And he advanced toward Charles, and commenced rolling up his sleeves.

"No, Lee," said Frank, placing himself before the frightened Ranger, "you must n't touch him."

"Must n't touch him!" repeated Lee, in surprise. "Why, was n't he jest tryin' to wallop your friend here?"

"Oh, he 's able to defend himself," answered Frank.

"Then he 's all right. But I have n't paid him for trying to Regulate me, that night."

"He did n't do it, did he?" inquired Frank.

"No, 'cause you fellows would n't let him."

"Then, we do n't want you to whip him now."

"Wal, if you say so, I won't; but he oughter be larnt better manners—had n't he, Pete?"

"'Course," was Pete's laconic answer.

"Now, Charley," said Archie, "you may take yourself off as soon as you wish; they will not hurt you."

"Not this time," said Lee, shaking his hard fist in Charles's face; "but we may come acrost you some time when you has n't nobody to stand up for you; then you had better look out—had n't he, Pete?"

"Had n't he, though!" was the answer.

Charles did not need any urging, and he was quickly out of sight.

"I 'd like to see you jest a minit, Frank," said Lee, as the former was about to move away.

Frank drew off on one side, and the Hiller continued,

"I promised I 'd allers be a friend to you fellers that stood up for me that night, and I want to let you see that I have n't forgot my promise. I know that I can 't do much for you, but I jest want to show you that I allers remember favors."

Here he turned, and made a motion to one of his companions, who darted off to the boat, and soon returned, bringing a young otter in his arms.

"I allers heerd," continued Lee, as his com-

panion came up, "that you have a reg'lar hankerin' arter ketchin' and tamin' wild varmints. Now, we want you to take this as a present from us. I know it ain't much, but, arter all, a young otter is a thing a feller can't ketch every day. Will you take it?"

"Certainly," answered Frank, as he took the little animal in his arms. "I have long wished for an otter, and I thank—"

"Hold on there," interrupted Lee. "Keep your thanks for them as needs them, or likes to hear 'em. We Hillers have got feelings as well as any body. It's our way of bringin' up that makes us so bad. Now, good-by; and, if you ever want any thing, jest call on Lee Powell."

And he and his companions walked rapidly toward their boat, and soon disappeared

CHAPTER XII.

A Deer-Hunt on the Water.

THE next morning, after breakfast, Frank and his cousin, accompanied by the dogs, got into the skiff, and pulled up the creek, on a "prospecting expedition." They had started for the swamp, which lay about two miles and a half from the cottage, to see what the prospects were for a good muskrat-hunt in the spring. This swamp covered, perhaps, five hundred acres, and near its center was a small lake, which emptied into Glen's Creek.

A few moments' pulling brought them to this lake, and Frank, who was seated at the helm, turned the boat's head toward a high point that projected for some distance out into the lake, and behind which a little bay set back into the land. This point was the only high land about the swamp, and stretched away back into the woods for several miles. It was a favorite place for sunfish and perch; and the boys landed, and

were rigging their poles, intending to catch some for their dinner, when they heard a strange noise, that seemed to come from the bay behind the point. They knew in a moment that it was made by a duck, but still it was a sound they had never heard before, and, hunter-like, they determined to discover where it came from. So, reaching for their guns, they crawled carefully through the bushes, until they came within sight of the bay. A brood of young ducks, under the direction of two old ones, were sporting about among the broad leaves of the water-lilies. They had never seen any like them before; but Frank knew in a moment, from descriptions he had often read, that they were eider-ducks, and he determined, if possible, to capture some of the young ones, which, he noticed, were but half-fledged, and too small to fly. But the question was how to proceed. If the ducklings could not fly, they could swim like a streak; and he knew that, the moment they were alarmed, they would either make for the opposite side of the bay or for the lake, and, if they succeeded in reaching the open water, he might whistle for his ducks.

His only chance was to corner them in the bay; they would then be obliged to hide among the lilies, and perhaps they might succeed in capturing some of them.

Hurriedly whispering to his cousin, they crept

back to the skiff, pulled around the point, and entered the bay. The moment they came in sight, the old ones uttered their cries of warning, took to wing, and flew out over the lake, and, as they had expected, the young ones darted in among the lilies, and were out of sight in an instant. But the boys had kept their eyes open, and knew about where to look for them; and, after half an hour's chase, they succeeded in securing three of them with the dip-net.

After tying them up in their caps, Frank pulled leisurely along out of the bay, and was just entering the lake, when Archie, who was steering, suddenly turned the boat toward the shore, and said, in a scarcely audible whisper,

"A deer—a deer! sure as I live!"

Frank looked in the direction his cousin indicated, and saw a large buck standing in the edge of the water, not twenty rods from them. Luckily he had not heard their approach, and Frank drew the boat closer under the point, to watch his motions.

They were a good deal excited, and Archie's hand trembled like a leaf, as he reached for his gun.

Another lucky circumstance was, that the dogs had not discovered him. Brave and Hunter could have been kept quiet, but Lightfoot was not sufficiently trained to be trusted.

The boys determined to make an effort to capture him; he would make a splendid addition to their museum. Besides, they had never killed a deer, and now the opportunity was fairly before them. But the question was how to proceed. The buck was out of range of their shot-guns, and they knew it would be worse than useless to fire at him; so they concluded to lie still in the boat, and await the movements of the game.

The buck was standing in the water, up to his knees, deliberately cropping the leaves of the lilies, and now and then gazing toward the opposite shore, as if he were meditating upon something. At length he appeared to have decided upon his course, for he waded deeper into the water, and swam boldly out into the lake.

This was exactly what the boys had wished for; and, when the buck had made about ten rods from the shore, Archie took his seat at the oars, and pulled the boat silently out from behind the point. The moment they entered the lake, Lightfoot discovered the game, and uttered a loud bark. The buck heard it, and his first impulse was to turn and regain the shore he had just left. But Archie gave way on the oars manfully, and succeeded in intercepting him; and the buck, finding himself fairly cut off, uttered a loud snort, and, seeming to understand that his only chance for escape was straight ahead, he settled himself down in the

water, and struck out again for the opposite shore.

The dogs now all broke out into a continuous barking, and Archie exclaimed, in an excited voice,

"Shoot him! shoot him!"

"He is too far off," answered Frank. "You must remember that our guns are loaded with small shot. Give way lively!"

The boys very soon discovered that they had no easy task before them. The light skiff, propelled by Archie's powerful strokes, danced rapidly over the little waves; but the buck was a fast swimmer, and made headway through the water astonishingly.

"Don't we gain on him any?" inquired Archie, panting hard from his exertions.

"Yes, a very little," answered Frank. "But he swims like a streak."

At length they reached the middle of the lake, and Frank, to his delight, discovered that they were gaining rapidly. Archie redoubled his efforts, and a few more strokes brought them close alongside of the buck, which snorted aloud in his terror, and leaped half-way out of the water, then settled down nobly to his work.

Had Frank been an experienced deer-hunter, he would have been very careful not to approach the game in that manner; for a deer, when he finds

himself unable to escape, will fight most desperately, and his sharp antlers and hoofs, which will cut like a knife, are weapons not to be despised. But Frank, in his excitement, did not stop to think of this, and, letting go the tiller, he seized his gun, and fired both barrels in quick succession. But the shot was not fatal; and the buck, maddened with pain, leaped almost entirely out of the water.

Frank now saw their danger, and, seizing the oars, attempted to turn the boat out of the reach of the wounded animal; but it was too late, for the buck, in his struggles, placed his fore-feet in the bow of the skiff, and overturned it in an instant, and boys, dogs, ducks, and all, were emptied into the cold waters of the lake. When they rose to the surface, they found the skiff right side up, and dancing over the waves they had made, and the ducks and oars were floating in the water around them.

Their first thought was to discover what had become of the buck; he and Brave were engaged in a most desperate fight, in which the dog was evidently getting the better of it. The hounds, probably not relishing their ducking, were making for the nearest shore, as if their lives depended upon the issue.

Frank swam up to the skiff, and took hold of it, to keep himself afloat; but Archie picked up an oar, and struck out toward the buck, exclaiming,

"I guess I'd better take a hand in this fight."

"No, no," said Frank, quickly, "you had better keep away from him; he has too much strength left. He would beat you down under the water in less than a minute. Brave can manage him alone."

The next moment Frank happened to think of his gun. Where was it? He drew himself up and looked into the canoe. It was not there; it was at the bottom of the lake.

"Archie," he exclaimed, "we've lost our guns."

"Just my luck," answered his cousin, bitterly. "Now, I'll have revenge for that."

And, swimming around behind the buck, out of reach of his dangerous hoofs, he raised himself in the water, and struck him a powerful blow, that shivered the blade of the oar into fragments. It was a fatal blow; and the buck ceased his struggles, and lay motionless on the water. It was a lucky circumstance for Brave that Archie had taken part in the fight, for the poor dog had experienced some pretty rough handling. He had received several wounds from the sharp hoofs of the buck, and there was a severe cut in his neck, from which the blood was flowing profusely; but the way he continued to shake the buck after Archie had dealt the fatal blow showed that there was plenty of fight left in him. Frank carefully lifted him into the boat, and, by their

united efforts, after a good deal of hard work, the buck was thrown in after him. The boys then climbed in themselves, and Frank said,

"Well, we have captured our first deer, have n' we?"

"I wish we had never seen him," answered Archie. "We 've lost our guns by the opera tion."

"I am afraid so; but we will, at least, make an attempt to recover them."

"How will we go to work?"

"We will dive for them."

Archie shrugged his shoulders, but made no reply.

Frank's first care was to bandage Brave's neck with his handkerchief. He then divested himself of his clothes, and, after wringing the water out of them, he spread them out in the bow of the boat to dry.

"I do n't much like the idea of going down in there," said Archie, looking dubiously at the dark, muddy water; "there may be snakes in it, or it may be full of logs, or the bottom may be covered with weeds that will catch hold of a fellow's leg and keep him down."

"I can't help it," said Frank; "we must have the guns; I 'd rather risk any thing than lose them. The only thing I am afraid of is that the water is too deep. I 'll be a little careful at first."

So saying, he lowered himself over the side of the boat, and, drawing in a long breath, sank slowly out of sight.

Meanwhile Archie was pulling off his clothes, and, when his cousin appeared, he exclaimed,

"How do things look down there? Rather muddy, is n't it?"

"Yes," answered Frank, as he wiped the water from his face, "but the bottom is all clear, and the water is only about fifteen feet deep."

"Did you see any thing of the guns?"

"No, I could n't stay down long enough to make observations. I 'm going to dive this time," he continued, as he commenced climbing back into the boat.

"Well, here goes!" said Archie.

And, clasping his hands above his head, he dived out of sight, and Frank followed close after.

When the latter again appeared at the surface, he found Archie holding on to the boat, with one of the guns elevated above his head, to allow the water to run out of the barrels.

The boys climbed up into the boat, and dived again, but neither of them met with any success. The next time Archie was again the fortunate one, for, when Frank rose to the surface, he was climbing up into the boat, with the other gun in his hand.

"I don't call this a very unlucky hunt, after all," said Frank.

"Neither do I," said Archie. "I say, Frank," he continued, "I wish we could reproduce in our museum the scene we have just passed through."

"So do I. If we could represent the buck in the act of upsetting us, it would be our 'masterpiece,' wouldn't it? But I am afraid that is further than our ingenuity extends."

The boys drew on their clothes, which were but partially dry, and, after pulling ashore to get the hounds, which had kept up a loud barking all the time, they turned the boat's head toward home.

After changing their clothes and eating a hearty dinner—during which they related their adventure to Mrs. Nelson and Julia—they carefully removed the buck's skin, and hung it up in the shop by a fire to dry.

Their guns were found to be none the worse for their ducking; the loads, of course, were wet, and had to be drawn, but a good coat of oil, and a thorough rubbing inside and out, made them look as good as new.

During the afternoon, as the boys sat on the piazza in front of the house, talking over the events of the morning, their attention was attracted by a combat that was going on between one of Frank's pet kingbirds and a red-headed woodpecker. The latter was flying zigzag through

the air, and the kingbird was pecking him most unmercifully. At length the woodpecker took refuge in a tree that stood on the bank of the creek, and then seemed perfectly at his ease. He always kept on the opposite side of the tree, and the kingbird, active as he was, could not reach him. His loud, angry twittering soon brought his mate to his assistance, and then the woodpecker found himself between two fires. After trying in vain to elude them, he suddenly popped into a hole in the tree, and stuck out his long bill, as if defying them to enter. The kingbirds were completely outwitted; and, after making two or three angry darts at the hole in which their cunning enemy had taken refuge, they settled down on the branches close by to wait until he should show himself. They had no intention of giving up the contest. The woodpecker seemed to take matters very coolly, and improved his time by pounding away industriously on the inside of the tree. Occasionally he would thrust his head out of the hole, but, seeing his enemies still on the watch, he would dodge back, and go to work again.

After waiting fully a quarter of an hour for him to come out, and seeing that the kingbirds had no idea of "raising the siege," Archie concluded (to use his own expression) that he "might as well lend a little assistance." So he ran round to the shop, and, having procured an ax, he went up to

the tree, and dealt it a heavy blow. The next moment the woodpecker flew out, and the kingbirds were after him in an instant. They followed him until he reached the woods, and then returned to the cottage.

CHAPTER XIII.

A 'Coon-Hunt.

E might relate many more interesting events that transpired before the hunting season set in; we might tell of the "tall times" the boys had whipping the trout-streams, of the trials of speed that came off on the river, when it turned out, as Archie had predicted, that Charles Morgan's sloop "could n't sail worth a row of pins;" and we might tell of many more desperate "scrapes" that came off between the bully and his sworn enemies, the Hillers; but we fear, reader, you are already weary of the Young Naturalist's home-life, and long to see him engaging in his favorite recreations—roaming through the woods, with his gun on his shoulder, or dealing death among the ducks on the river.

Well, autumn came at length; and, early one chilly, moonlight evening, Frank and his cousin, accompanied by George and Harry, might have

been seen picking their way across the meadow at the back of Mrs. Nelson's lot, and directing their course toward a large cornfield, that lay almost in the edge of a piece of thick woods, about a quarter of a mile distant.

They had started on a 'coon-hunt. Frank and Harry, who were two of the best shots in the village, were armed with their double-barreled shot-guns, and the others carried axes and lanterns.

We have said that it was a moonlight night, but, so far as a view of the chase was concerned, the light of the moon would benefit them but little; and the boys carried the lanterns, not to be able to follow the 'coon when started, but to discover him when "treed," and to assist them in picking their way through the woods.

During a raccoon-hunt, but little is seen either of the dogs or the game. The woods, let the moon shine ever so bright, are pitch-dark; and the dogs rely on their scent and the hunter trusts to his ears.

The 'coon seldom strays far from his tree, and, of course, when started, draws a "bee-line" for home, and the game is for the dogs—which should be very swift, hardy animals, having the courage to tackle him if he should turn at bay—to overtake him, and compel him to take to some small tree, where he can be easily shaken off or shot. But if he succeeds in reaching home, which he al-

ways makes in a large tree, he is safe, unless the hunter is willing to go to work and fell the tree.

The boys were accompanied by their dogs, which followed close at their heels. Lightfoot was about to take his first lesson in hunting, but Brave and Sport evidently knew perfectly well what the game was to be, and it was difficult to restrain them.

A few moments' walk brought them to the corn field. A rail-fence ran between the field and the woods; and two of the boys, after lighting their lanterns, climbed over the fence, and the others waved their hands to the dogs, and ordered them to "hunt 'em up." Brave and Sport were off in an instant, and Lightfoot was close at their heels, mechanically following their motions, and evidently wondering at their strange movements.

The boys moved quietly along the fence, and, in a few moments, a quick, sharp yelp from Brave announced that he had started the first 'coon. The boys cheered on the dogs, and presently a dark object appeared, coming at full speed through the corn, and passed, at a single bound, over the fence. The dogs, barking fierce and loud at every jump, were close at his heels, and both they and the game speedily disappeared in the darkness. The boys followed after, picking their way through the bushes with all possible speed.

The chase was a short one, for the dogs soon broke out in a regular, continuous barking, which

announced that the 'coon was treed. The hunters, guided by the noise, soon came in sight of them, standing at the foot of a small sapling. Brave and Sport took matters very easily, and seemed satisfied to await the arrival of the boys, but Lightfoot had caught sight of the 'coon as he was ascending the tree, and was bounding into the air, and making every exertion to reach him.

Frank and Harry stood ready with their guns to shoot him, and the others held their lanterns aloft, and peered up into the top of the tree, to discover his hiding-place; but nothing could be seen of him. The sapling had grown up rather high, and all objects outside of the circle of light made by their lanterns seemed to be concealed by Egyptian darkness.

"He 's up there, I know," said Archie.

And, laying down his ax and lantern, he caught hold of the sapling, and shook it with all his strength. But it was a little too large for him to manage, and, although it swayed considerably, the 'coon could easily retain his hold.

"Well," said Archie, "if he will not come down to us, we 'll have to go up to him, I suppose."

And he commenced ascending the tree. Archie was a good hand at climbing, and had shaken more than one 'coon from his roost, and he carefully felt his way up, until he had almost reached the top of the sapling, when, not wishing to trust his weight on

the small limbs, he stopped, and again shook the tree, and this time with better success. There was an angry snarling among the branches above his head, and the 'coon, after trying in vain to retain his hold, came tumbling to the ground.

Quick as thought the dogs were upon him, and, although he made a most desperate resistance, he was speedily overpowered and killed.

The boys picked up their prize, and went back to the cornfield. The dogs were again sent in, and another 'coon was started, which, like the first, "drew a bee-line" for the woods, with the dogs close behind, and the boys, worked up to the highest pitch of excitement, followed after as fast as their legs could carry them.

The 'coon had managed to get a good start of his pursuers, and he led them a long chase through a low, swampy part of the woods, to the top of a ridge, where the heavy timber grew; and when, at length, the boys came up with the dogs, they found them standing at the foot of a large maple fully ten feet in circumference.

"There!" exclaimed George, "the rascal has succeeded in reaching home. Good-by, 'coon!"

"Yes," said Frank, leaning on the muzzle of his gun, and wiping the perspiration from his forehead, "we're minus that 'coon, easily enough, unless we wait until morning, and cut the tree down"

"Look here, boys," suddenly exclaimed George, who had been holding his lantern above his head, and examining the sides of the tree; "did you ever see a tree look like this before?"

As they moved around to the side where George stood, Archie called out,

"There must be a big nest of 'coons in here; the tree is completely skinned."

"Yes," said Frank, "we've accidentally stumbled upon a regular 'coon-tree. There must be a big family of them living here. The tree looks as if some one had taken an ax and cleaned off the bark. But," he added, "finding where the 'coons have been and catching them are two very different things."

"What do you mean?" inquired Archie. "You don't pretend to say that the 'coons are not in the tree?"

"Certainly I do. I wouldn't be afraid to stake Brave against any little cur in the village that the 'coon the dogs have just followed here is the only one in the tree."

"What makes you think so?"

"Why, now is their feeding-time, and all the 'coons in this part of the woods are in the cornfield. It wouldn't pay to cut down this big tree for one 'coon; so let's go home and go to bed, and early to-morrow morning we will come back here and bag our game."

The boys agreed to this, and they whistled to their dogs, and started through the woods toward home.

The next morning, at the first peep of day, they again set out, and in half an hour arrived at the 'coon-tree.

The boys knew that they had something to accomplish before they could secure their game, but they were not the ones to shun hard work. They had frequently cut down trees for a single 'coon, and they felt confident that there were at least three of the animals in the tree, and they were willing to work for them.

Archie and George were armed, as on the preceding night, with axes, and, after pulling off their coats, they placed themselves on opposite sides of the tree, and set manfully to work. Harry and Frank stood by, ready to take their places when they grew tired, and the dogs seated themselves on the ground close by, with their tongues hanging out of the sides of their mouths, and now and then giving vent to an impatient whine.

The boys worked for an hour and a half—taking their turns at chopping—almost without speaking. At length the top of the tree began to waver, and a loud crack announced that it was about to fall. Frank and Archie were chopping, and the blows of their axes resounded with redoubled force, and the other boys caught up the guns, and ran off in the

direction in which the tree was about to fall, followed by Sport and Lightfoot, and Brave stationed himself close behind his master, and barked and whined furiously.

A few sturdy blows finished the business, and the tree began to sink—slowly at first, then with a rushing sound, and struck the earth with a tremendous crash. In an instant boys and dogs were among the branches. The 'coons—some of which were not injured in the least by the fall—scattered in every direction; and one of them—a fine, large fellow—bounded off through the bushes.

Frank discovered him just in time, and, fearing that he would lose sight of him, he hurled his ax at him with all his strength; but it went wide of the mark, and Frank started in hot pursuit. He was very swift of foot, and there seemed to be no limit to his endurance, but, in running through the bushes, the 'coon had decidedly the advantage. Frank was not slow to discover this, and he began to think about sending his ax after him again, when he heard a crashing in the bushes behind him, and the grayhound passed him like the wind, and two or three of his tremendous bounds brought him up with the 'coon.

Frank knew very well that Lightfoot had something of a job before him, for it requires a very tough, active dog to "handle" a full-grown coon when he is cornered. But Frank thought it was a

capital time to judge of the grayhound's "grit;" so he cheered him on, and hurried forward to witness the fight.

As Lightfoot came up, he made a grab at the 'coon, which, quick as a flash, eluded him, and, when the hound turned upon him, the 'coon gave him one severe bite, when Lightfoot uttered a dismal howl, and, holding his nose close to the ground, beat a hasty retreat; and the Young Naturalist could not induce him to return.

During the fight, short as it was, Frank had gained considerably, and, as the 'coon turned to make off, he again threw his ax at him, which, true to its aim, struck the 'coon on the head, and stretched him lifeless on the ground.

Meanwhile Archie was endeavoring to secure his 'coon, under rather more difficult circumstances.

As soon as the tree had begun to fall, Archie dropped his ax, seized a short club that lay near him on the ground, and, discovering a 'coon making for the bushes, he started after him at full speed.

The animal appeared to run heavily, as if he had been partially stunned by the falling of the tree; and Archie had followed him but a short distance, when he had the satisfaction of discovering that he was gaining at every step. The 'coon seemed to understand that his chance of escape was rather small; and, after various windings and twistings,

commenced ascending a small tree. Archie ran forward with all possible speed, with the hope of reaching the tree before he could climb out of the way. The 'coon moved but slowly, and Archie felt sure of his prize; and, as soon as he came within the proper distance, he struck a powerful blow at the animal, but he was just out of reach, and the club was shivered to pieces against the tree.

Archie, however, did not hesitate a moment, but, placing his hands on the tree, commenced climbing after him. The 'coon ascended to the topmost branch, and looked down on his enemy, growling and snapping his teeth, as if to warn him that he intended to make a desperate resistance; but Archie was not in the least intimidated, and, reaching the branch on which the 'coon was seated, he shook it violently, and the animal tumbled to the ground, and, as soon as he could regain his feet, started off again.

Archie descended as quickly as possible, and started in pursuit, hoping to overtake his game before he could again take to a tree. There was an abundance of large trees growing in the woods, and, if the 'coon should take it into his head to ascend one of them, Archie might whistle for his game.

The young hunter well understood this, and he "put in his best licks," as he afterward remarked,

and, in a few moments, had almost overtaken him, and began to look around for something to strike him with, when the 'coon, as if guessing his intention, suddenly turned and ran up a large tree that stood close by, and, crawling out on a limb, about fifty feet from the ground, he settled himself down, as if he had concluded to take matters more easily.

This was discouraging; and Archie seated himself on a log under the tree, and for a moment thought seriously of giving up the chase. But the 'coon was a fine, fat fellow, and his skin would make a valuable addition to the museum, and, besides, he had followed him so far already, that he was reluctant to go back to his companions without him, and, on second thought, he concluded that he would *not* go back unless he could carry the 'coon with him.

He first thought of ascending the tree, but, after taking a hasty survey of it, he abandoned the idea. The tree was partially decayed; in fact, there was but one sound limb in it that Archie could discover, and that was about four feet above the one on which the 'coon was seated, and stretched out directly over it.

Archie did not like the idea of trusting himself among the unsound limbs, and, besides, the cunning animal had crawled out to the extreme end of one of the decayed branches, which bent be-

neath his weight, and the young hunter, of course, could not follow him.

There was only one way that Archie could discover to bring him down; and he straightway opened upon the devoted 'coon a tremendous shower of clubs and sticks. He was a very accurate thrower, and, for some time, had hopes of being able to bring down the 'coon; but, although the missiles frequently hit him, Archie could not throw them with sufficient force; and he again turned his attention to the tree. Throwing his arms around it, he commenced working his way up. The bark was very smooth and slippery, and the lowest limb was the one on which the 'coon had taken refuge; but he kept steadily at work, and his progress, though slow, was sure, and he reached the limb; and, bearing as little of his weight as possible upon it, he drew himself up to the sound limb above.

After testing it thoroughly, to make sure that it would sustain his weight, he commenced walking out on the branch on which the 'coon was seated, keeping a firm hold of the limb above his head. He had made scarcely a dozen steps, when there was a loud crack, and the branch on which he was standing broke into fragments, and fell to the ground with a crash, carrying the 'coon with it, and leaving Archie hanging in the air, fifty feet from the ground.

Not in the least terrified at his dangerous situation, the young hunter coolly swung himself up on the limb, and, crawling carefully back to the tree, slid rapidly down the trunk, and, as if nothing had happened, ran to the place where the 'coon had fallen, hoping that at last he was secured.

But he was again disappointed. Nothing was to be seen of the animal, and only a few drops of blood on the leaves indicated the direction in which he had gone. This quickly caught Archie's eye, and he began to follow up the trail, which led toward a creek that flowed close by. But when he arrived upon its bank he was again at fault—the trail was lost; and, while he was running up and down the bank, searching for it, he happened to cast his eye toward the opposite side of the creek, and there was his 'coon, slowly ascending a tall stump that stood at the water's edge.

Archie could not refrain from giving a shout of joy, for he was confident that the chase would soon be over; and he hurried, impatiently, up and down the bank to find some place to cross, and finally discovered a small tree lying in the water, whose top reached almost to the opposite bank. The 'coon had undoubtedly crossed on this bridge; and Archie sprang upon it. It shook considerably, but he kept on, and had almost reached the opposite side, when the tree broke, and he disappeared in the cold water. He rose immediately,

and, shaking the water from his face, struck out for the shore, puffing and blowing like a porpoise. A few lusty strokes brought him to the bank, and, as he picked up a handful of stones, he said to himself,

"I guess I'm all right now. If I could only have found some stones when I treed that 'coon in the woods, he would not have been up there now, and I should not have got this wet hide. But we 'll soon settle accounts now."

As we have said, the 'coon had taken refuge in a high stump. The branches had all fallen off, with the exception of one short one, about two feet from the top; and the 'coon, after trying in vain to squeeze himself into a small hole, about half-way up the stump, settled down on this limb, and appeared to be awaiting his fate.

Archie took a favorable position, and, selecting a stone, hurled it with all his force at the 'coon. It whizzed harmlessly by, close to his head; but the next brought him to the ground, dead.

"There!" exclaimed the young hunter, as he shouldered his prize, and walked up the creek to find a crossing-place, "I've worked pretty hard for 'coons, first and last, but this beats all the hunts I ever engaged in."

He at length reached a place where the water was about knee-deep, waded across the creek, and started through the woods to find his com-

panions. When he arrived at the place where they had felled the tree, he saw Harry sitting on a log, with Frank's gun in his hand, but nothing was to be seen of the other boys.

As soon as the latter discovered Archie, he burst into a loud laugh.

"No doubt you think it a good joke," said Archie, as he came up, "but I don't. It isn't a funny thing to tramp through the woods, on a cold day like this, with your clothes wringing wet. But I've got the 'coon."

"You must have had a tough time catching him," said Harry. "But let us go down to the camp."

As they walked along, Archie related his adventures; and, when he told about being "dumped in the creek," Harry laughed louder than ever.

A few moments' walk brought them to what Harry had called the "camp." It was in a little grove of evergreens, on the banks of a clear, dancing trout-brook. A place about forty feet square had been cleared of the trees and bushes, and in it stood a small, neatly-built log-cabin, which Frank and some of his companions had erected the winter previous.

Near the middle of the cabin a hole, about four feet square, had been dug, and in this a fire was burning brightly; and a hole in the roof, directly over it, did duty both as chimney and window

On the floor, near the fire—or, rather, there *was* no floor, the ground serving for that purpose—stood some tin dishes, which one of the boys had just brought to light from a corner of the cabin, four plates, as many knives and forks, two large platters, a coffee-pot, four quart-cups, and a pan containing some trout, which George had caught in the brook, all cleaned and ready for the spit, and there was also a large plate of bread and butter.

Frank, who always acted as cook on these expeditions, and knew how to get up a dinner that would tempt an epicure, was kneeling before the fire, engaged in skinning some squirrels which Brave had treed for him.

George was in front of the cabin, chopping wood; and close by the door lay five 'coons—the fruits of the morning's hunt; and near them lay the dogs, fast asleep.

Such was the scene presented when Harry and Archie burst in upon the camp. The latter was greeted with a loud laugh.

"Well, boys," said he, as he threw his 'coon down with the others, "you may laugh, but I wish some of you were obliged to go through what I did. I was bound to have the 'coon, if I had to follow him clear to Moosehead Lake."

"That's the way to talk," said Frank. "Now, throw yourself down by the fire, and I'll soon be

ready to give you something to eat. A cup or two of hot coffee will set you all right again."

Archie's ducking and his long walk in his wet clothes had chilled him completely through, and he was very willing to comply with his cousin's suggestion, and he drew up as close as possible to the fire.

When Frank had finished skinning the squirrels, he stuck them up before the fire, on spits, to roast. The trout he served in the same manner; and, raking out a few live coals from the fire, he placed the coffee-pot upon them, when the work of getting breakfast began in earnest.

In the course of half an hour the impatience of the hungry hunters (whose appetites had been sharpened by the savory smell of the cooking viands) was relieved by Frank's welcome invitation—

"Now, boys, you may help yourselves."

And they *did* help themselves most bountifully.

Archie kept his place by the fire, and a plate filled with bread and butter, and roasted squirrel and trout, and a cup of coffee, were passed over to him; and, supporting himself on one elbow, he did them ample justice.

The dogs were well supplied with what remained of the breakfast; and, after washing the dishes in the clear water of the brook, and placing them carefully away for future use, the boys seated

themselves around the fire, and Harry exclaimed, as he settled himself back into a comfortable position,

"Give us a story, Frank."

"Well," answered Frank, after thinking a few moments, "I remember one that, I think, will interest you. You will probably remember, Archie that, during the last visit we made at Uncle Joe's, we met his brother Dick, who has passed forty years of his life among the Rocky Mountains You will remember, also, that he and I went mink-trapping, and camped out all night, and during the evening he related to me some of his adventures, and wound up with the following story of his 'chum,' Bill Lawson. I will try to give it, as nearly as possible, in his own words.

CHAPTER XIV.

Bill Lawson's Revenge.

"THIS Bill Lawson," said Dick, knocking the ashes from his pipe, "was *some* in his day. I have told you about his trappin' qualities—that there was only one man in the county that could lay over him any, an' that was ole Bob Kelly. But Bill had some strange ways about him, sometimes, that I could not understand, an' the way he acted a'most made me think he was crazy. Sometimes you could n't find a more jolly feller than he was; an' then, again, he would settle down into one of his gloomy spells, an' I could n't get a word out of him. He would sit by the camp-fire, an' first fall to musing; then he would cover his face with his hands, an' I could see the big, scalding tears trickle through his fingers, an' his big frame would quiver and shake like a tree in a gale of wind; then he would pull out his long, heavy huntin'-knife, an' I could see that he had several notches cut in the handle. He

would count these over an' over again; an' I could see a dark scowl settle on his face, that would have made me tremble if I had not known that I was his only sworn friend, an' he would mutter,

"'Only seven! only seven! There ought to be eight. There is one left. He must not escape me. No, no; he must die!'

"An' then he would sheath his knife, an' roll himself up in his blanket, an' cry himself to sleep like a child.

"I had been with ole Bill a'most ten years—ever since I was a boy—but he had never told me the cause of his trouble. I didn't dare to ask him, for the ole man had curious ways sometimes, an' I knowed he wouldn't think it kind of me to go pryin' into his affairs, an' I knowed, too, that some day he would tell me all about it.

"One night—we had been followin' up a bar all day—we camped on the side of a high mountain. It was very cold. The wind howled through the branches of the trees above our heads, makin' us pull our blankets closer about us an' draw as nigh to the fire as possible.

"Ole Bill sat, as usual, leanin' his head on his hands, an' lookin' steadily into the fire. Neither of us had spoken for more than an hour. At len'th the ole man raised his head, an' broke the silence by sayin',

"'Dick, you have allers been a good friend to

me, an' have stuck by me like a brother, through thick an' thin, an', I s'pose, you think it is mighty unkind in me to keep any thing from you; an' so it is. An' now I'll tell you all.'

"He paused a moment, an', wipin' the perspiration from his forehead with his coat-sleeve, continued, a'most in a whisper,

"'Dick, I was not allers as you see me now—all alone in the world. Once I was the happiest boy west of the mountains. My father was a trader, livin' on the Colorado River. I had a kind mother, two as handsome sisters as the sun ever shone on, an' my brother was one of the best trappers, for a boy, I ever see. He was a good deal younger nor I was, but he was the sharer of all my boyish joys an' sorrows. We had hunted together, an' slept under the same blanket ever since we were big enough to walk. Oh! I was happy then! This earth seemed to me a paradise. Now look at me—alone in the world, not one livin' bein' to claim me as a relation; an' all this was brought upon me in a single day.'

"Here the ole man stopped, an' buried his face in his hands; but, suddenly arousin' himself, he continued,

"'One day, when the ice were a'most out of the river, father an' me concluded it was about time to start on our usual tradin' expedition; so we went to work an' got all our goods—which consisted of

beads, hatchets, lookin'-glasses, blankets, an' such like—into the big canoe, an' were goin' to start 'arly in the mornin' to pay a visit to the Osage Injuns, an' trade our things for their furs. That night, while we were eatin' our supper, a party of horsemen came gallopin' an' yellin' down the bank of the river, an', ridin' up to the door of the cabin, dismounted, an', leavin' their horses to take care of themselves, came in without ceremony. We knowed very well who they were. They were a band of outlaws an' robbers, that had been in the county ever since I could remember, an', bein' too lazy to make an honest livin' by trappin', they went around plunderin' an' stealin' from every one they come across. They had stole three or four horses from us, an' had often come to our cabin an' called for whisky; but that was an article father never kept on hand. Although he was an ole trapper, an' had lived in the woods all his life, he never used it, an' did n't believe in sellin' it to the red-skins. The captain of the outlaws was a feller they called "Mountain Tom," an' he was meaner than the meanest Injun I ever see. He did n't think no more of cuttin' a man's throat than you would of shootin' a buck. The minute they came into the cabin we could see that they had all been drinkin'. They acted like a lot of wild buffalo-bulls, an', young as I was, I could see that they meant mischief, an' I knowed that our chance for

life was small indeed. As I arterwards learned, they had been up the river, about two miles, to a half-breed's shanty, an' had found half a barrel of whisky, an', arter killin' the half-breed, an' drinkin' his liquor, they felt jest right for a muss, an' had come down to our cabin on purpose for a fight.

"'"Now, ole Lawson," said Mountain Tom, leanin' his rifle up in the corner, "we have come down here for whisky. We know you've got some; so jest draw your weasel, if you want to save unpleasant feelin's; an' be in a hurry about it, too, for we're mighty thirsty."

"'"Tom," said my father, "how often have I told you that I haven't got a drop of liquor in the shanty? I never had. I don't use it myself, an' I don't keep it for—"

"'"That's a lie!" yelled three or four of the band.

"'"You a trader among the Injuns, an' not keep whisky?"

"'"We know a thing or two more than that."

"'"We have heard that story often enough," said Tom. "We know you have got the liquor, an' we are goin' to get it afore we leave this shanty. If you won't bring it out an' treat, like white man had ought to do, we'll have to look for it ourselves—that's all. Here, boys," he said, turning to his men, "jest jump down into the cellar an' hunt it up, 'cause we know he's got

some. An' you, Jake," he added, catching hold of a big, ugly-lookin' feller, "you stand here, an shoot the first one that tries to get away."

"'The men ran down into the cellar, and we could hear them cussin' an' swearin', as they overturned every thing in the useless search. My mother, a'most frightened to death, gathered us children around her, an' sank back into the furthest corner. I thought my father had gone crazy; he strode up an' down the floor of the cabin like some caged wild animal, clenchin' his hands an' grindin' his teeth in a way that showed that there was plenty of fight in him, if he only had a chance to let it out. Once in awhile he would look at his rifle, that hung against the wall, then at the man that stood at the top of the cellar-stairs, guardin' us, as if he had a'most made up his mind to begin a knock-down an' drag-out fight with the rascals. But then he would look at my mother an' us children, back in the corner, an' go to pacin' the floor again. If we had been out of the way, I know that he would not have let them rummage about as he did; he would have had a fight with them that would do your eyes good to look at. But, as it was, I guess he kinder thought that if he was peaceable they would go off an' leave us, arter they found that no whisky was to be had. Arter searchin' around the cellar for more 'n ten minutes, one of 'em called out,

"'"Wal, boys, it's easy enough to see that the cuss has fooled us. Thar's no liquor here. He's hid it in the woods, somewhere 'bout the shantee."

"'"That's so," said another. "I'll bet he has got plenty of whisky somewhere. Let's go up and hang him till he tells us where it is."

"'"No, no, that won't do," said Mountain Tom. "You fellers are gettin' so that you talk like babies. Shoot the rascal down. We've had trouble enough with him. If we can't get the liquor here, there are plenty of places where we can get it."

"'"That's the talk!" yelled the band. "Shoot him down! Tear him to pieces!"

"'The man who was standin' at the head of the stairs heard all the rascals had said, an', with a yell of delight, he raised his rifle an' drew a bead on my mother. But the ole man was too quick for him. With a bound like a painter, he sprang across the floor, an', grabbin' the villain by the throat, lifted him from his feet, and throwed him down into the cellar, an' in an instant shut the door, an' fastened it with a heavy bar of wood. Then, takin' down his rifle, he said to us, a'most in a whisper,

"'"Now run! run for your lives! We must cross the prairy an' get into the woods afore the rascals cut their way out. Run! quick!"

"'My mother took my sisters by the hand an'

led them out, an' me an' my brother followed her. Father closed both the windows an' the door, an' fastened them on the outside. All this while the robbers had been yellin' an' swearin', an' cuttin' away at the cellar-door with their tomahawks; an' we well knowed that they would soon be out an' arter us. Our cabin stood in a large, natural prairy, an' we had to travel full half a mile acrost the open ground afore we come to the woods. My father followed close behind us, with his rifle, ready to shoot the first one that come in sight, an' kept urgin' us to go faster. We hadn't gone more 'n half the distance acrost the prairy, when a loud crash and yells of triumph told us, plain enough, that the villains had worked their way out of the cellar. Then heavy blows sounded on the window-shutter, which, strong as it was, we knowed could not long hold out ag'in 'em. In a few minutes it was forced from its hinges, an' Mountain Tom sprang out.

"'"Here they are, boys," he shouted. "Come on! We 'll l'arn 'em not to hide—"

"'The report of father's rifle cut short his words, an' Mountain Tom, throwin' his hands high above his head, sank to the ground like a log. By this time the rest of the band had come out, an the bullets rattled around us like hailstones. My father and brother both fell—the latter never to rise; but father, although he had received three

bullets, staggered to his feet, an' follered along arter us, loadin' his rifle. Then began the race for life. It seemed to me that we flew over the ground, but the villains gained on us at every step. Just as we reached the woods, my father called out,

"'"Down—down, every one of you! They're going to shoot again!"

"'Obeyin' that order was what saved my life. I throwed myself flat into the bushes, an' escaped unhurt; but both my sisters were shot dead, an' my father received another ball that brought him to the ground. My mother, instead of thinkin' of herself, kneeled beside him, an' supported his head in her arms. The next minute the outlaws entered the woods, an' one passed so close to me that I could have touched him.

"'"Wal, Bill Lawson," said a voice that I knowed belonged to Mountain Tom, "you see I'm here again. I s'pose you kind o' thought you had rubbed me out, didn't you?"

"'"Yes, I did," said father—an' his voice was so weak that I could hardly hear him.

"'"You won't have a chance to draw a bead on me again, I guess. We shoot consider'ble sharp—don't we?"

"'"I shan't live long," said father. "But, whatever you do to me, be merciful to my wife an'—"

"'The dull thud of the tomahawk cut short my

father's dying prayer, an' his brains were spattered on the bush where I was concealed; an', a'most at the same moment, another of the band buried his knife in my mother's heart.'

"Old Bill could go no further. He buried his face in his hands an' cried like a child. At length, by a strong effort, he choked down his sobs, and went on.

"'I knew no more until I found myself lyin' in the cabin of an ole hunter, who lived about ten miles from where we used to live. He had been out huntin', an' had found me lyin' close beside my father an' mother. He thought I was dead, too, at first, but he found no wounds on me; so, arter buryin' all my relatives in one grave, he took me home with him. In three or four days I was able to get around again; an', beggin' a rifle an' some powder an' ball of the ole hunter, I started out. I went straight to the grave that contained all I loved on earth, an' there, kneelin' above their heads, I swore that my life should be devoted to but one object—vengeance on the villains who had robbed me of all my happiness. How well I have kept my oath the notches on my knife will show. Seven of them have fallen by my tomahawk; one only is left, an' that is Mountain Tom. For fifteen long years I have been on his trail; but the time will come when my vengeance will be complete.'

"An' the ole man rolled himself up in his

blanket, an', turning his back to me, sobbed himself to sleep.

"But my story is not yet told," continued Dick. "About a year arter this, Bill an' me were ridin' along, about noon, in a little valley among the mountains, when we came, all of a sudden, on the camp of two trappers.

"'Heaven be praised! there he is!' said ole Bill.

"An', swinging himself from his horse, he strode up to one of the men, who sprang from his blanket, and ejaculated,

"'Bill Lawson!'

"'Yes, Mountain Tom,' said ole Bill, 'I'm here. You an' me have got a long reckonin' to settle now.'

"The villain at first turned as pale as a skewer; but he seemed to regain his courage, and exclaimed,

"'It won't take us long to settle up.'

"And, quick as lightnin', he drew his knife, an' made a pass at Bill.

"But he had got the wrong buck by the horn. The ole man was as quick as he; an', grabbin' hold of his arm, he took the knife away from him as if he had been a baby.

"'Tom,' said he, as he drew his tomahawk from his belt, 'I've followed you all over this country for fifteen years, an', thank Heaven, I've found you at last.'

"'Oh, Bill,' shrieked the condemned man, sinkin' on his knees before the ole man, 'I was—'

"'Stand up,' said Bill, ketchin' hold of him, an jerkin' him to his feet. 'You were brave enough when you were killing my wounded father.'

"'Oh, Bill—'

"'With the tomahawk you killed my father, an' by the tomahawk you shall die.'

"'For mercy's sake, Bill,' again shrieked the terrified man, taking hold of a tree for support, 'hear me!'

"The tomahawk descended like a streak of light, and the last of the murderers sank at the ole man's feet. The eighth notch was added to those on the knife, an' the debt was canceled."

CHAPTER XV.

Wild Geese.

ABOUT two o'clock in the afternoon the boys concluded that it was about time to start for home; so, after putting out the fire and fastening the door of the cabin, they set out. Archie led the way, with a 'coon slung over each shoulder, and another dangling from his belt behind. The others followed close after him, in "Indian file." In this manner they marched through the woods, joking and shouting, and talking over the events of the day, and now and then indulging in a hearty laugh when they happened to think how Archie looked when he came into the camp, dripping wet. But Archie took matters very good-naturedly, and replied,

"If I had come back without the 'coon, I should never have heard the last of it; and now you laugh at me because I fell into the drink while I was trying to catch him."

In half an hour they reached the edge of the timber, and were about to climb over the fence into the cornfield, when a long, loud bark echoed through the woods.

"That's Brave," exclaimed Frank; "and," he continued, as all the dogs broke out into a continuous cry, "they've found something. Let's go back."

The boys all agreed to this, and they started back through the woods as fast as their legs could carry them.

A few moments' run brought them in sight of the dogs, sitting on their haunches at the foot of a stump, that rose to the hight of twenty feet, without leaf or branch. Near the top were several holes; and, as soon as Frank discovered these, he exclaimed,

"The dogs have got a squirrel in here."

"How are we going to work to get him out?" inquired Archie.

"Let's cut the stump down," said George.

"That's too much sugar for a cent," answered Harry. "That will be working too hard for one squirrel."

"Why will it?" asked George. "The stump is rotten."

And he laid down his 'coon, and walked up and dealt the stump several lusty blows with his ax.

Suddenly two large black squirrels popped out

of one of the holes near the top, and ran rapidly around the stump. Quick as thought, Frank, who was always ready, raised his gun to his shoulder, and one of the squirrels came tumbling to the ground; but, before he had time to fire the second barrel, the other ran back into the hole.

"Hit the tree again, George," exclaimed Harry, throwing down his 'coon, and bringing his gun to his shoulder.

"It 's no use," said Frank; "they will not come out again, if you pound on the stump all day."

George, however, did as his brother had requested, but not a squirrel appeared.

"Let 's cut the tree down," said Archie.

And, suiting the action to the word, he set manfully to work.

A few blows brought off the outside "crust," and the heart of the tree was found to be decayed, and, in a few moments, it came crashing to the ground, and was shivered into fragments by the fall.

The boys supposed that there was only one squirrel in the tree, and were running up to secure him, when, to their surprise, they discovered a number of the little animals scattering in different directions, and drawing "bee-lines" for the nearest trees.

Frank killed one with his remaining barrel, and Harry, by an excellent shot, brought down another

that had climbed up into the top of a tall oak, and was endeavoring to hide among the leaves. Brave and Sport both started after the same one, and overtook and killed it before it could reach a tree; but the grayhound came very near losing his. As soon as the stump had fallen, he singled out one of the squirrels, and, with two or three of his long bounds, overtook it; but, just as he was going to seize it, the squirrel dived into a pile of brush, out of the reach of the hound. A few loud, angry yelps brought Archie and George to his assistance, and they immediately began to pull the pile of brush to pieces. Suddenly the squirrel darted out, and started for a tree that stood about two rods distant. The boys threw their clubs at him, but he reached the foot of the tree unharmed. At this moment Lightfoot discovered him; two or three bounds carried him to the tree, and, crouching a moment, he sprang into the air, and attempted to seize the squirrel. But he was just a moment too late; the little animal had ascended out of his reach; but the next moment the sharp report of Harry's gun brought him to the ground.

The squirrels were now all secured, and the young hunters again turned their faces homeward.

One cold, stormy night, in the latter part of October, Frank and his cousin lay snug in bed, listening to the howling of the wind and the pattering

of the rain against the window, and talking over their plans for the future, when, all at once, Frank sat upright in bed, and, seizing Archie's arm with a grip that almost wrung from him a cry of pain, exclaimed,

"Listen! listen!"

And the next moment, clear and loud above the noise of the storm, they heard the trumpet-like notes of a flock of wild geese. They passed over the house, and the sound grew fainter as they flew rapidly away.

"My eye!" exclaimed Archie, "don't I wish it was daylight, and we stood out in front of the house, with our guns all ready!"

"That's a nice thing to wish for," answered Frank; "but, if it were daylight, we should not stand any better chance of shooting them than we do here in bed."

"What's the reason?"

"Why, in the first place, if they went over at all, they would fly so high that it would need a rifle to reach them; and, in the next place, we have not got a rifle. Just wait until morning, and we'll make a scattering among them, if some one don't get the start of us."

"I suppose we are not the only ones that have heard them."

"Not by a good deal. I shouldn't wonder if there were a dozen fellows that have made up

their minds to have a crack at them in the morning."

And Frank was right. Many a young hunter, as he lay in bed and heard the wild geese passing over, had determined to have the first shot at them, and many a gun was taken down, and cleaned and loaded, in readiness for the morning's hunt.

Wild geese seldom remained longer than two or three days about the village, and then they generally staid in the swamp. This made it difficult for the young hunters to get a shot at them, and only the most active and persevering ever succeeded.

Although for a month the young sportsmen had been expecting them, and had carefully scanned the river every morning, and listened for the welcome "honk-honk" that should announce the arrival of the wished-for game, this was the first flock that had made its appearance.

"I am afraid," said Archie, "that some one will get the start of us. Let's get up."

"No; lie still and go to sleep," said Frank.

"I am afraid we shall oversleep ourselves. I wonder what time it is."

"I'll soon find out," said Frank.

And, bounding out on to the floor, he lighted a match, and held it up before the little clock that stood on the mantle-piece.

"It's twelve o'clock," he continued.

And he crawled back into bed, and in a few mo ments was almost asleep, when Archie suddenly exclaimed,

"They 're coming back!"

And the geese again passed over the house, in full cry.

They knew it was the same flock, because they came from toward the river, and that was the same direction in which they had gone but a few moments before.

In a short time they again returned; and, during the quarter of an hour that followed, they passed over three times more.

"I wonder what is the matter with those geese," said Archie, at length.

"Nothing," replied Frank; "only they have got a little bewildered, and do n't know which way to go."

"Where will we have to go to find them in the morning?"

"Up to the swamp," answered Frank. "The last time they passed over they flew toward the north, and the swamp is the only place in that direction where they can go to find water, except Duck Lake, and that is too far for them to fly this stormy night."

"I wish it was morning," said Archie, again "Let 's get up."

"What's the use? It will be five long hours before it will be light enough to hunt them up; and we might as well go to sleep."

"I'm afraid we shall sleep too long," said Archie, again, "and that some one will beat us."

"No fear of that," answered Frank; "I'll wake you up at three o'clock."

And he turned over and arranged his pillow, and in a few moments was fast asleep. But Archie was so excited that he found it difficult even to lie still; and he lay awake almost two hours, thinking of the sport they should have in the morning, and at last dropped into an unquiet slumber.

It seemed to him that he had hardly closed his eyes, when a strong hand was laid on his shoulder, and a voice said, in his ear,

"Wake up here; it's three o'clock."

He did not need a second call, but was out on the floor in an instant.

It was still storming. The wind moaned and whistled through the branches of the trees around the cottage, and sent the big drops of rain rattling against the window. It was a wild time to go hunting, and some boys would have preferred tumbling back into bed again. But Frank and his cousin had made up their minds that if any one got a shot at the geese, they were to be the ones.

As soon as they were dressed, Frank led the way into the kitchen, and, while he was lighting a fire, Archie brought out of the pantry a pan of milk, two spoons and bowls, and a loaf of bread. He was so impatient to "get a crack at the geese," as he said, that, although he was very fond of bread and milk, he could scarcely eat at all.

"I'm afraid some one will get the start of us," he exclaimed, noticing that his cousin, instead of being in a hurry, was taking matters very coolly.

"What if they do?" answered Frank, deliberately refilling his bowl from the pan. "We shall stand just as good a chance as they do. It will not be daylight these two hours. It's as dark as pitch, and all we can do is to go up to the swamp, and get under a tree, and wait until it is light enough to see where our geese are."

As soon as they had finished their breakfast, they brought out their guns, and began to prepare for the hunt. Extra charges were put in each barrel; and, while they were drawing on their rubber coats, Archie said,

"We had better leave my dogs at home, had n't we? Lightfoot would make too much noise, and Sport, although he would keep still enough, would be of no use to us, for he will not go into the water after a wounded bird."

"Yes," said Frank, "we had better leave them

behind. But we must have Brave with us. I'll go and call him."

And he opened the door, and, walking out upon the piazza, which ran entirely around the cottage, gave a low whistle. There was a slight rustling among the straw in the kennel where the dogs slept, and Brave came out, and followed his master into the house.

After wrapping up their guns in their coats, they were ready to set out.

Half an hour's walk, through mud up to their ankles, brought them to Uncle Mike's house, which stood at the end of the road, and, climbing over the fence that inclosed his pasture, they struck off through the woods toward the lake.

After picking their way for half a mile over fallen logs, and through wet, tangled bushes, Frank, who was leading the way, suddenly stopped, and, leaning back against a tree to get out of the rain, said,

"Here we are. Had we better try to cross the creek now, or shall we wait until daylight?"

"You must have cat's eyes," said Archie, trying to peer through the darkness. "I knew there was a creek here somewhere, but I didn't suppose we had reached it yet."

"Well, we have; and, unless I am very much mistaken, you will find the bridge right before you.

Shall we try to cross it now? It will be a slippery job."

The "bridge" that Frank referred to was simply a large tree that the boys had felled across the creek, and stripped of its branches. It could easily be crossed in the day-time, but in a dark, stormy night it was a difficult task to undertake. The boys could scarcely see their hands before them; and Frank had accomplished something worth boasting of in being able to conduct his cousin directly to the bridge.

"It will require the skill of a rope-dancer to cross that bridge now," said Archie; "and, if we should happen to slip off into the water, we would be in a nice fix."

"Besides," said Frank, "if we did succeed in crossing, we could not go far in the dark, on account of the swamp; so, I think, we had better wait."

The boys stood under the tree, talking in low tones, when Frank suddenly exclaimed,

"We're all right. The geese are in the lake. Do you hear that?"

Archie listened, and heard a splashing in the water, mingled with the hoarse notes of the gander.

"I wish it was daylight," said he, impatiently.

"Don't be in a hurry," said Frank; "there's time enough."

"I'm afraid they will start off as soon as it gets light."

"Oh, no; the lake is a good feeding-ground, and they would stay, perhaps, all day, if they were not disturbed."

In about an hour the day began to dawn; and, as soon as objects on the opposite side of the creek could be discerned, Frank led the way across the bridge. A short run through the woods brought them to the swamp.

Now the hunt began in earnest. The swamp was covered with water, which, in some places, was two feet deep; and the trees and bushes grew so thick, that it was with difficulty that they could work their way through them. Besides, they were obliged to proceed very carefully, for every step brought them nearer the game; and the slightest splashing in the water, or even the snapping of a twig, might alarm them.

At length they found themselves on the shore of the lake; and, peering out from behind a thicket, where they had crept for concealment, they discovered, about half-way to the opposite shore, as fine a flock of geese as one would wish to see—fifteen of them in all. They were swimming around, turning their heads first one way and then the other, as if they had been alarmed

"It's a long shot, isn't it?" said Archie, measuring the distance with his eye.

"Yes," answered his cousin; "but that is not the worst of it; they are getting further away from us every moment."

"Well," said Archie, cocking his gun, and pushing it carefully through the bushes, "you be ready to take them as they rise."

As he spoke he took a quick aim at the nearest of the flock, and pulled the trigger. The cap snapped.

"Plague on the gun!" he exclaimed. "Shall I throw it in the lake!"

"No, no," answered Frank; "try the other barrel; and you had better be quick about it—they're going to fly."

Archie again raised his gun to his shoulder. This time there was no mistake. The nearest of the geese received the entire charge, and lay dead on the water.

Frank now waited for his turn; but the geese, after skimming along the surface of the water until they were out of gun-shot, rose in the air, and flew rapidly across the lake.

As the boys stood watching their flight, they saw a cloud of smoke issue from a clump of bushes on the opposite shore, followed by the report of a gun, and one of the flock fell to the water, and another, evidently badly wounded, rose high in the

air, and flew wildly about. Another puff of smoke rose from the bushes, a second report was heard, and the wounded bird came tumbling into the lake.

The geese, surprised at this sudden repulse, quickly wheeled, and flew back toward the place where our hunters were stationed.

Frank raised his gun to his shoulder, and, as soon as they came within range, he pulled the trigger, and brought down two geese—one stone-dead, and the other with a broken wing. Hardly waiting to see the effect of the shot, he fired his second barrel at the flock, just as they were disappearing over the tops of the trees. They had flown so high, that he hardly expected the shot would prove effective. To his surprise, one of the flock gradually fell behind, and, after trying in vain to support itself, fell slowly through the air, until it almost reached the water; then it seemed to regain the power of using its wings, and began to fly more regularly.

"Try your gun again, Archie," said Frank; "I'm afraid we are going to lose him."

Archie accordingly drew a bead on the goose, but with no better success, and the bird speedily disappeared over the trees.

"Confound my luck!" exclaimed Archie, impatiently. "I'll try and keep my powder dry after this."

"He can't fly far," said Frank. "Let's be lively, and we will have him yet. Here, Brave!" he continued, pointing to the geese in the lake, "fetch 'em out!"

Brave plunged into the water, and made toward the nearest of the geese, which happened to be the one Frank had wounded. As soon as the bird saw him approaching, instead of trying to save himself by flight, he raised himself in the water, elevated his uninjured wing, and set up a loud hiss. But these hostile demonstrations, instead of intimidating the Newfoundlander, served rather to enrage him, and he kept on, with open mouth, ready to seize the game. The moment he came within reach, the goose thrust out his long neck, and, catching Brave by the ear, dealt him a hard blow over the head with his wing. But he did not have time to repeat it, for the dog gave a loud, angry yelp, and, springing forward in the water, seized the goose, and killed it with a single bite; then, turning round, he swam back to the shore, deposited the game at his master's feet, and again plunged in to bring out the others.

"I wonder who that is on the other side of the lake?" said Archie.

"I guess it's Bill Johnson," answered Frank, who had reloaded his gun, and stood holding it in the hollow of his arm. "I saw a dog that looked

very much like his bringing out the geese. There he is now!"

And as he spoke the boy stepped out of the bushes, and a loud, shrill whistle echoed across the lake.

"That's Bill," said Archie. "Hallo!" he continued, raising his voice so that William could hear; "wait for us at Uncle Mike's—will you?"

"All right," shouted William, in reply.

And, gathering up his game, he again disappeared in the bushes.

By this time Brave had brought out the last of the geese, and Archie had succeeded in shooting off the wet charge; so they started back toward the road.

Frank led the way, carrying three of the geese; Brave followed close at his heels, carrying the fourth; and Archie brought up the rear, loading his gun as he went.

An hour's walk brought them to Uncle Mike's, where they found William sitting on the fence, waiting for them.

"What luck?" inquired Archie, as they came up.

"Only two," answered William; "but you have been more fortunate."

"Yes," said Archie, "we've got four; and Frank wounded another so badly that he can't fly far. We are going to look for him in the creek, as we go along."

"And I hope we shall get him," said Frank; "for he was the largest of the flock, and I want him for our museum."

The boys walked slowly down the creek, keeping a good look-out for the wounded bird among the reeds along the bank; but they reached the cottage without seeing any signs of him.

"I'm afraid we've lost him," said Archie.

"I'm sorry," said Frank, "for he was a nice, big fellow. Let's go back; perhaps we've overlooked him. I am certain that he could not have flown to the river."

At this moment a slight splashing in the water, on the opposite side of the creek, attracted their attention, and they discovered their game swimming slowly about among the reeds, as if trying to find some place of concealment.

"Now, Archie," said Frank, dropping the butt of his gun to the ground, "there's a chance for you to retrieve your lost reputation."

"And I'll take advantage of it," said Archie, raising his gun to his shoulder.

A loud report followed his words, and the goose, after a few slight struggles, lay motionless on the water. Brave immediately sprang into the creek, and, forcing his way among the reeds, seized the bird and brought it to the shore.

CHAPTER XVI.

A Chapter of Incidents.

THE next day had been set apart by Frank and his cousin for a squirrel-hunt; but the first thing they heard, when they awoke in the morning, was the pattering of the rain against their bedroom window, and the hunt was, to use Archie's expression, "up stump." Although they had been expecting exciting times, bringing down the squirrels (for the woods were fairly alive with them), and were a good deal disappointed at being obliged to postpone their intended excursion, they were not the ones to complain, they knew there would be many pleasant days before the winter set in, and the hunt was put off without ceremony.

They were at no loss to know how to pass the day. There was plenty of work to be done: their traps must be overhauled and put in working order; the Speedwell was waiting to be dismasted and put under cover; their fishing-tackle must be oiled and

packed away, their pets taken care of and provided with winter-quarters; and there was a host of other things to attend to; and they were in no fear that the time would hang heavily on their hands.

As soon as the boys were dressed, they went into the shop and set manfully to work. Archie kindled a fire in the stove—for it was a cold, unpleasant day—and Frank pulled from under the work-bench a large chest, filled with spring-traps, "dead-falls," broken reels, scraps of lead, and numberless other things he had collected, and began to pull over the contents. The traps were taken out and subjected to a thorough rubbing and greasing.

While thus engaged, their attention was attracted by the peculiar "cawing" of a crow that flew over the shop, and, a moment afterward, a whole chorus of the harsh notes sounded in the direction of the woods. The boys hurried to the door, and saw a multitude of crows pouring from every part of the woods, cawing with all their might, and directing their course toward a large pine-tree, which stood in the meadow back of the orchard, and which was already covered with them.

"What 's the matter?" inquired Archie.

"They act as if they had discovered an owl," answered Frank.

"Have they? Let 's go and shoot him."

"That will, probably, be a harder job than you anticipate," said Frank. "However, we will try."

After shutting the dogs up in the shop, the boys ran into the house, drew on their rubber coats, and started through the orchard, loading their guns as they went—putting an extra charge of powder and a couple of buck-shot into each barrel.

In a few moments they reached the fence that ran between the orchard and the meadow, and Archie inquired,

"What shall we do now?"

"We can't go much further," said Frank, drawing a flap of his coat over his gun, to protect it from the rain. "There isn't a stump, or even a tuft of grass, in the meadow large enough to cover us. Besides, if we undertake to climb over the fence, every crow will be out of sight in a moment; then good-by, owl."

"He wouldn't fly off, would he?"

"I should say he would," answered Frank, with a laugh. "He'd leave like a streak of lightning."

"That's news to me. I always thought owls couldn't see in the day-time. Natural history says so."

"I know it," said Frank. "But there is one thing certain: they must be able to see a little, or else their sense of smell or hearing is very acute

for it is very difficult to get a shot at them, even in the day-time. That one in our museum led me a chase of half a day before I shot him, and I had a rifle, too."

"What is to be done now?" inquired Archie. "We don't want to stand here in the rain much longer."

"We must wait until he flies into the woods, or somewhere else, so that we can get a shot at him."

"I can make him fly. I've killed squirrels further off than that, many a time. Suppose I shoot at him?"

"Shoot away; but you must remember that an owl and a squirrel are two different things. The thick feathers of the owl will glance a charge of shot that would blow a squirrel to pieces."

Archie made no reply, but crawled up behind a thick cluster of currant-bushes that grew close by the fence, and, thrusting his gun between the branches, was settling himself into a comfortable position, when the owl suddenly leaped from his perch, and flew off toward the woods, as Frank had said he would, "like a streak of lightning," followed by the whole flock of his tormentors, which screamed with all their might.

"Now's our time," said Frank. "Come on!"

And, clearing the fence at a bound, he started across the meadow at the top of his speed. Ar-

chie followed close at his heels, and a few minutes run brought them to the edge of the woods.

"Now the hunt begins in earnest," said Frank. "We must separate; we shall make too much noise if we go together."

"Where 's the owl?" inquired Archie.

"As near as I can guess, he must be in that tall hemlock," answered Frank, pointing through the woods toward the tree in question.

Archie immediately moved cautiously off in the direction indicated, leaving his cousin to take care of himself.

Guided by the noise made by the crows, he soon discovered the owl, not where Frank had supposed him to be, but on a tree that stood to the right, and several rods further off. Placing a large tree between himself and the game, he threw himself on his hands and knees, and crawled along as silently as possible, taking good care to keep out of sight of the crows.

He had arrived almost within range of the owl, when he found before him a spot of considerable extent, which was entirely destitute of bushes or large trees, and covered only with saplings, which grew so thinly that he would certainly be discovered if he attempted to pass through them. This brought him to a stand-still. He stood thinking whether he had better risk a shot at the owl or retrace his steps, when one of the crows uttered a

cry of warning, which was immediately answered by the others, and the whole flock was out of sight in an instant. The owl gazed around a moment with his great eyes, then spread his wings, leaped into the air, and was flying rapidly away, when there was a sharp report, and he came tumbling to the ground, and the indefatigable Frank rose from the bushes, and ran forward to secure his prize.

"Dished again!" said Archie, to himself. "I would have wagered a good deal that Frank was not within gun-shot."

"I say, Archie, where are you?" called out Frank.

"Here I am. I thought, sure, that owl was mine."

And Archie came forward, holding his gun in the hollow of his arm, and looking a little crest-fallen.

"You were not far behind," said Frank, laughing.

"That's poor consolation. I wanted to be first. Never mind," he added, catching up the owl, and throwing it over his shoulder, "I'll be ahead of you yet."

This generous rivalry had existed between the cousins from their earliest boyhood. In all athletic sports—such as running, ball-playing, swimming, and the like—Archie was acknowledged to be the superior; but in hunting Frank generally carried off the

palm. Archie, however, perseveringly kept up the contest, and endeavored to accomplish, by bold and rapid movements, what his cousin gained by strategy; and, although he sometimes bore off the prize, he more frequently succeeded in "knocking every thing in the head" by what the boys called his "carelessness."

This was the source of a great deal of merriment between the cousins; and, although they sometimes felt a little mortified at their defeat (as did Archie now), they ever afterward spoke of it as a "good joke."

After breakfast the boys went into the shop again, and Frank sharpened his knife, and began to remove the skin of the owl, intending to stuff it and place it in the museum, while Archie took his ax and started for a grove of willows, that grew on the banks of the creek, to get some timber to make a dead-fall trap. He had been gone scarcely a moment before he returned in a great hurry, and, throwing down his ax, seized his gun, which stood in the corner behind the door, exclaiming,

"Now I've got a chance to make up for losing that owl. A flock of ducks, regular canvas-backs, have just flown over, and I think they lit in the swamp. You'll have to make tracks to get the start of me this time."

And he shouldered his gun, and ran out of the shop, banging the door after him.

Frank immediately dropped the owl, caught up his gun, and started in hot pursuit. But his cousin had made the most of his time, and, when Frank reached the gate, he saw Archie far up the road, tearing along as fast as his legs could carry him, and spattering the mud in every direction.

Under any other circumstances, Frank would have stopped to laugh; but, as it was, he had no time to lose. So he ran down the bank of the creek, and, untying his skiff, pushed out into the stream, and a few strokes of the oars brought him to the opposite shore; then, fastening the skiff to a tree, he started through the woods, toward the swamp. This enabled him to gain on his cousin almost half a mile.

But Archie happened to have luck on his side this time; for the ducks, instead of alighting in the swamp, as he had supposed, had come down in the creek; and, as he was hurrying along the road, which ran close to the creek, a slight splashing in the water and a hoarse "quack" attracted his attention, and caused him to proceed with more caution. He listened until the noise was repeated, in order that he might know exactly where the ducks were, and then began to worm his way through the wet bushes, in the direction of the sound. At length he crawled up behind a large log, that lay close to the water's edge, and had the satisfaction of finding the game fairly before him.

But the most difficult part of the undertaking was yet to come. The ducks—seven of them in all—were fully twenty rods off; and, although Archie had great confidence in the "shooting qualities" of his gun, he hardly dared to fire—he might only wound the birds; and, as he had no ammunition with him besides the loads in his gun, he was anxious to make every shot tell.

"This won't do," he soliloquized. "I must get up nearer."

He was about to retrace his steps, when he noticed that the ducks began to move impatiently around, and acted as if about to fly.

In an instant Archie's mind was made up; it was now or never; and, taking a quick aim at the nearest of the flock, he blazed away. It was his only chance, and a slim one at that, for the distance was so great that he hardly expected the shot would take effect; but, when the smoke cleared away, he discovered one of the flock lying motionless on the water, and another, too badly wounded to rise, was swimming slowly around him. The rest of the flock were skimming along the surface of the creek, toward the swamp. They were far beyond the range of his gun, and he knew it would do no good to fire at them; so he concluded, to use his own expression, to "make sure of what he had got," and, taking aim at the wounded bird, was about to give it the contents of the other bar-

rel, when he heard the report of a gun some distance further up the creek, and looked up just in time to see one of the birds fall into the water.

"Who's that, I wonder," said Archie, to himself. "It can't be Frank, for he wouldn't be on that side of the creek; besides, I had a good long start of him."

His soliloquy was cut short by the movements of the flock, which, instead of continuing on their course up the creek, rose higher in the air, and flew about in confusion.

This opportunity was not lost by the concealed sportsman, and a second bird came down with a broken wing. The ducks then wheeled and flew back toward the place where Archie was stationed. As soon as they came within range, he fired and brought down another bird, which landed among the bushes on the opposite side of the creek.

He now turned his attention to the wounded duck, which was swimming in a circle around his dead companion, as if perfectly bewildered.

"I wish I had my powder-flask and shot-bag," said Archie. "How foolish I was not to bring them! I bet that I'll never start out again with only one load in my gun."

But there was no time for regrets. The duck seemed to be recovering his strength, and began to flap his wings, as if preparing to fly. Archie began to fear that he should lose him; and, throw-

ing down his gun, he gathered up an armful of sticks and branches, and straightway opened fire on the bird. The duck dodged the missiles like a flash, and every now and then renewed his attempts to fly; but, at length, a heavy piece of root struck him, and stretched him out lifeless on the water.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed a strong, cheery voice. "That's what I call shooting ducks under difficulties."

Archie looked up and saw his cousin standing on the opposite side of the creek, with his gun on one shoulder and two of the flock slung over the other.

"I came very near getting the start of you, after all—didn't I?" continued Frank.

"Was that you shooting up there?" inquired Archie.

"Yes; I had almost reached the swamp, when I happened to think that perhaps the ducks might be in the creek, so I turned back."

"A lucky circumstance for you. But I beat you, after all. I've got three ducks."

"Where are they? I don't see but two."

"The other is over there in the bushes, somewhere."

Frank immediately commenced looking for it, and Archie procured a long branch, and waded out as far as possible into the creek, and, after consid-

erable exertion and a thorough wetting, succeeded in pulling both of his ducks to the shore.

During the three weeks that followed, the boys passed the time in various ways—sometimes hunting in the woods or on the river, but more frequently working in the shop. They also spent considerable time in attending to their pets. The young otter proved to be the most interesting little animal they had ever seen. He grew quite tame, and when the boys entered the room where he was kept, he would come toward them, uttering a faint whine, and, if they seated themselves, he would jump up into their laps, and search through their pockets for something to eat—such as bread or crackers, of which the boys always took especial care to have a good supply.

At length they began to long for winter, and many were the speculations as to when the "first fall of snow" would come. Their traps were all in order, and they were impatient for an opportunity to make use of them. Besides, they had agreed with George and Harry to "go fox-hunting the very first time there was snow enough for tracking."

A week more passed, and Thanksgiving Day came; and in the evening Frank and his cousin went down to visit George and Harry, intending, as they said, to "stay only a few minutes. But Mr. Butler soon came in, and began to relate some

of his "sailor yarns," as he called them (for he was a retired sea-captain), and the boys became so interested in listening to them, that they did not notice how rapidly the time flew by, and it was ten o'clock before they knew it. They then bade the Captain "good-night." George and Harry, as usual, agreed to accompany them part of the way, and, when they reached the door, what was their surprise to find the ground white with snow, and the air filled with the rapidly-falling flakes.

"We'll have that fox-hunt to-morrow," exclaimed Harry, in delight.

"Of course we will," said Archie, "and I would n't take ten dollars for my chance of catching one."

"You mean, if the snow does n't melt," said Frank, quietly.

"Oh, that's always the way with you," said Archie. "What makes you try to throw cold water on all our expectations, in that way?"

"I did n't intend to," answered Frank, with a laugh; "but, you know, we have been disappointed very often."

"Yes," said George, "but I guess we are all right this time. It snows pretty fast, and the air does n't feel like a thaw or rain."

Frank acknowledged this; and they walked along, talking about the exciting times they expected to have on the morrow, until they reached

the "big elm"—a large tree that stood leaning over the creek, just half-way between Captain Butler's and where Frank lived. Here George and Harry stopped, and, after promising to be at the cottage early on the following morning, turned their faces homeward.

CHAPTER XVII.

The Greyhound Outgeneraled.

THE next morning, at an early hour, George and Harry arrived at the cottage, and, after a light and hastily-eaten breakfast, they set out. Frank and Harry were armed, as usual, with their guns, while the others carried axes. They crossed the meadow at the back of the orchard, passed through the cornfield which had been the scene of the 'coon-hunt, a few weeks before, and struck out through the woods. The dogs were then sent out ahead, and they had not gone more than half a mile, when Sport uttered a long, loud howl, and, when the boys came up with him, he was running impatiently about with his nose close to the ground.

"A fox has been along here," said Frank, bending over and examining a track in the snow, "and the trail looks fresh."

"Hunt 'em up! hunt 'em up!" shouted Archie, excitedly, waving his hand to the dogs.

Sport bounded off on the track like a shot, and Lightfoot followed close after. Brave barked and howled furiously, and acted as if he wished very much to accompany them; but the swift hounds would have distanced him in a moment.

It must not be supposed that it was the intention of the boys to follow up the hounds—that would have been worse than useless. Perhaps the chase would continue for several hours. They had once hunted a fox all day, without coming in sight of him. Reynard has ways and habits of his own, which a person who has had experience in hunting him understands. He always runs with the wind, and generally follows a ridge. The hunters take advantage of this, and "run cross-lots" to meet him, sometimes gaining on him several miles in this manner.

The moment the hounds had disappeared on the trail, Frank—who knew all the "run-ways" of the game like a book—led the way through the woods toward a ridge that lay about a mile distant, where they expected the fox would pass.

A quarter of an hour's run brought them to this ridge, and they began to conceal themselves behind trees and bushes, when Archie suddenly exclaimed,

"We're dished, boys. The fox has already passed."

"Come on, then," said Frank. "No time to lose. We must try again."

And he again led the way, on a keen run, through a strip of woods, across a wide meadow toward another ridge, that lay fully three miles distant.

At length the baying of the hounds echoed through the woods, far below them. Louder and louder it grew, and, in a few moments, they swept up the ridge in full cry. The boys hurried on as rapidly as possible, and reached the ridge in about an hour. Although they were accustomed to such sport, they were pretty well tired out. They had run the greater part of the way through thick woods, filled with fallen logs and tangled bushes; but they now felt confident that the hunt was nearly over. They knew they had gained considerably on the fox, and his capture would be an ample reward for their trouble.

As soon as they reached the ridge, they threw themselves rapidly across it in all directions, and, to their delight, discovered that the fox had not yet passed. They stationed themselves in such a manner that it would be impossible for him to pass on either side of them without coming within reach of their guns, and patiently awaited his appearance. They had not remained long in this position, when Archie, who was stationed lowest down the ridge, exclaimed, in a subdued voice,

"There they come, boys! Now, look sharp!"

The boys listened intently, and heard, faint and far off, the well-known bay of Sport. It was sharp and short—very different from the note he had uttered when the chase first commenced. Louder and louder grew the noise, as the hounds came rapidly up the ridge toward the place where the boys were stationed, and every one was on the alert, expecting every moment to see the fox break cover.

Suddenly a loud howl blended with Sport's baying, and the hounds seemed to turn and sweep down the valley.

"The fox has left the ridge, boys," said Frank.

"Then we're dished again," exclaimed Archie.

"Perhaps not," continued Frank. "He will have to go across the meadow, and will run the risk of being caught by Lightfoot. We must try and cut him off."

And he led the way down the ridge, in the direction the chase was tending.

In a few moments the hounds broke out into a continuous cry, and, when the boys emerged from the woods, they saw them standing at the foot of a tall stump, which stood near the middle of the meadow.

Brave immediately ran to join them, and Harry exclaimed,

"I'd like to know what those dogs are doing there?"

"Why, they've got the fox treed," said Frank.

"A fox treed!" repeated Harry, with a laugh. "Whoever heard of such a thing?"

"I have often read," answered Frank, "that when a fox is hard pressed, and finds himself unable to escape, he will take advantage of any place of concealment he can find."

While this conversation was going on, the boys had been running toward the stump, and, when they reached it, they found Brave with his head buried in a hole near the ground, now and then giving his tail a jerk, but otherwise remaining as motionless as a statue.

"What do you think now of the possibility of treeing a fox?" inquired Frank, turning to Harry.

"I don't believe it yet," said the latter.

"Then how is it that the dogs are here?"

"The fox may have run down here and doubled on his trail, and thus thrown the dogs off the scent."

"He didn't have time to do that," said Archie, who had divested himself of his coat, and stood with his ax, ready to cut down the stump. "He's in here, I'm certain. See how Brave acts."

"It will not take long to find out," said George, who was a good deal of his brother's opinion that the fox was not in the tree.

And he and Archie set to work, with the intention of cutting it down. But it was found to be hollow; and, after taking out a few chips, Archie stooped down to take a survey of the interior, and spied the fox crouched in the darkest corner.

"Hand me your gun, Frank," said he; "I'll shoot him."

"I would n't shoot him," said Frank. "It is a good time to try Lightfoot's speed. Let 's get the fox out, and give him a fair start, and if he gets away from the hound, he is entitled to his life."

The boys readily agreed to this proposal—not out of any desire to give the fox a chance for his liberty, but in order to witness a fair trial of the grayhound's speed, and to enjoy the excitement of the race.

George and Harry provided themselves with long poles, with which to "poke" the fox out of his refuge. Brave and Sport were unceremoniously conducted away from the tree, and ordered to "lie down;" and Frank took hold of the grayhound, intending to restrain him until the fox could get a fair start.

"All ready now," said Archie. "Keep a good look-out, Frank, and let the hound go the instant the fox comes out. You know, Lightfoot is young yet, and it won't do to give the game too long a start."

"All right," answered Frank.

And he tightened his grasp on the strong, impatient animal, which struggled desperately to free himself, while George and Harry began the work of "poking out the fox." They thrust their poles into the holes they had cut in the roots of the stump, and the next moment out popped the fox, and started toward the woods like a streak of light.

The meadow was about a mile and a half square, and was laid off in "dead furrows"—deep ditches, which are dug, about four rods apart, to drain off the water. The fox took to the bank of one of these furrows, and followed it at a rate of speed which the boys had never seen equaled.

The moment Lightfoot discovered him, he raised himself on his hind-legs, and struggled and fought furiously. But Frank would not release him in that position, for fear the hound would "throw" himself; and he commenced striking him on the head, to compel him, if possible, to place his fore-feet on the ground, but all to no purpose.

During the struggle, short as it was, the fox had gained nearly thirty rods. Archie was not slow to notice this, and he shouted to his cousin,

"Let him go! let him go! The fox has too long a start already."

Frank accordingly released the hound, which made an enormous bound, and, as Frank had expected, he landed, all in a heap, in one of the dead

furrows, and, before he could recover himself, the fox had gained two or three rods more. But when the hound was fairly started, his speed was astonishing. He settled down nobly to his work, and moved over the ground as lightly as if he had been furnished with wings.

Had he been a well-trained dog, the boys would have felt no concern whatever as to the issue of the race; but, as it was, they looked upon the escape of the fox as a very probable thing. The fox was still following the dead furrow, and Lightfoot, instead of pursuing directly after him, as he ought to have done, took to another furrow which ran parallel to the one the fox was following, and about four rods from it.

The fox had a good start, but the enormous bounds of the grayhound rapidly lessened the distance between them; he gained at every step, and finally overtook him, and the two animals were running side by side, and only four rods apart.

Suddenly the cunning fox turned, and started off exactly at right angles with the course he had been following. The grayhound, of course, had not been expecting this, and he made a dozen of his long bounds before he could turn himself. During this time the fox gained several rods.

As before, the hound pursued a course parallel with that of the fox, instead of following directly after him.

In a few moments they were again running side by side, but this time further apart than before. Again and again the fox turned, each time nearing the woods, and gaining considerably; and finally, reaching the end of the meadow, he cleared the fence at a bound, and disappeared in the bushes.

"Now, that's provoking!" exclaimed Archie.

"Never mind," answered Frank. "I don't think the fox can go much further. He must be pretty well tired out, judging by the way he ran. Here, Sport!" he continued, "hunt 'em up!"

Sport was off like a shot, and the boys followed after as fast as their legs could carry them.

When they reached the woods, they found Lightfoot beating about in the bushes, as if he expected to find the fox concealed among them. Sport was standing over the trail of the fox, as motionless as if he had been turned into stone.

"Hunt 'em up!" shouted Frank, again—"hunt 'em up."

The hound uttered a loud bark, and instantly set off on the trail, and Lightfoot, as before, followed close at his heels.

"Now," exclaimed Frank, "we must change our tactics."

"Yes," said Harry. "A little further on, the ridge branches off, and there is no knowing which one the fox will follow. Come, George, we will go this way."

And he turned and ran down into the meadow again.

"Run like blazes, now!" shouted Frank.

And, suiting the action to the word, he turned off in the opposite direction, and led the way through the woods at a rate which made Archie wonder. They ran along in "Indian file"—Brave bringing up the rear—for almost two miles, through the thickest part of the woods, when they again found themselves on the ridge. After ascertaining that the fox had not yet passed, they took their stations.

"I would really like to know which way that fox went," said Archie, panting hard after his long run.

"I am almost certain that he took to the other ridge," answered Frank. "I think we should have heard the hound before this time, if he had turned this way."

They remained in their places of concealment for almost an hour, without hearing any sounds of the chase, and Frank said,

"We might as well start for home."

"Dished again, are we?" said Archie, in a deprecating tone. "That's too bad! Well," he continued, "we can't always be the fortunate ones, but I wish I could have had the pleasure of shooting that fox. But which way do we go to get home?"

"We must go exactly south," said Frank.

"Which way is that?"

"I will soon tell you."

And Frank drew a small compass from his pocket, and, in a moment, continued,

"This is the way. Come on!"

And he turned his face, as Archie thought, directly *from* home, and struck boldly out. Their long run had taxed their endurance to the utmost. If they had "been in practice," they would have looked upon it as merely a "little tramp;" for, during the previous winter, they had often followed a fox all day without experiencing any serious inconvenience; but, as this was the first exercise of the kind they had had for almost a year, they felt the effects of it pretty severely.

Archie, who had lived in the city during the summer, was "completely used up," as he expressed it; and his cousin was weary and footsore; and it seemed as though neither of them had sufficient strength left to take another step.

They kept on, hour after hour, however, without once stopping to rest; and, about three o'clock in the afternoon, they climbed over the fence that inclosed Uncle Mike's pasture, and came in sight of the cottage.

George and Harry were sitting on the piazza, and, as soon as they came within speaking distance, the latter held up the fox, exclaiming,

"We were lucky, for once in our lives."

"If we had been five minutes later, we should have lost him," said George, as Frank and his cousin came up to where the brothers were sitting. "We reached the ridge just in the 'nick of time.' The fox was just passing, and Harry brought him down by a chance shot. Here, Frank," he continued, "you take the fox; we have no use for him."

Frank thanked him; and the boys then went into the house, and, after dinner, the brothers started for home.

Frank and his cousin went into the study, and the former selected his favorite book from his library, and settled himself in an easy-chair before the fire; while Archie stretched himself on the bed, and was fast asleep in a moment.

And here, reader, we will leave them reposing after their long run; but we hope soon to introduce them again in works entitled, "FRANK IN THE WOODS," and "FRANK ON THE PRAIRIE."

THE END.

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